

## Abstract

Frederick, Lisa Senneff. *Let There Be Revolution: The Destructive Creacionismo of Vicente Huidobro and Gertrude Stein.* (Under the direction of Michael Grimwood.)

Throughout their writings, both Vicente Huidobro and Gertrude Stein experimented with language, emphasized the connection between visual and literary arts, and helped to redefine the relationship between reader and writer. Both Stein and Huidobro lived in Paris in the first part of the twentieth century, and both writers worked and associated with the same people. Through their works, Stein and Huidobro challenged the boundaries of rational thought while suggesting that destruction is essential to the process of creation.

Huidobro's theory of *Creacionismo* asserts that the poet is a "little God" and that he has the ability to create poetic realities that are distinct from, though parallel to, our own worldly reality. Although Stein never openly practiced Huidobro's artistic theory, her works reflect Huidobro's in their attempts to create a new realm of communication that relies on nonsensical language to express meaning. This thesis examines Stein's nonsensical language, her relationship with her reader, her connection with visual art, and her tendency to use her writings to come to terms with her own identity. It also studies Huidobro's poetic creations, linguistic experimentations, and his anti-Christian writings in the context of his own spirituality and position in society. While focusing on their shared thematic interests, their distinct literary styles, and their tendencies to destroy while creating, this project explores the extent to which Huidobro's and Stein's geographical displacements influenced their experiments with the sounds, meaning, and communicative potential of language.

LET THERE BE REVOLUTION:  
THE DESTRUCTIVE *CREACIONISMO* OF  
VICENTE HUIDOBRO AND GERTRUDE STEIN

by  
LISA SENNEFF FREDERICK

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

ENGLISH

Raleigh

2003

APPROVED BY:

-----  
-----  
Chair of Advisory Committee

## **Personal Biography**

Lisa Senneff Frederick spent her childhood and youth in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She attended high school at The Albuquerque Academy and moved to North Carolina in 1994 to attend Davidson College. After graduating from Davidson with a B.A. in English and Spanish in 1998, she moved to Atlanta, Georgia and worked in advertising for three years. She began graduate school at North Carolina State University in June of 2001 and will graduate with her Master's degree in English in May of 2003. She and her husband, Chris, live in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. John Morillo and Dr. Gregory Dawes for their insightful feedback and invaluable comments. I especially want to thank Dr. Michael Grimwood for devoting countless hours to helping me formulate my ideas, organize my thoughts, and revise my writing. Without his advice and words of encouragement, this project could not have been completed.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Chris, for his constant support, spirited pep talks, and genuine interest in my studies.

## Table of Contents

	Page
1. Preface.....	1
2. Introduction.....	4
3. Chapter 1: Geographical Displacement.....	8
4. Chapter 2: Poetic Reality and the <i>Creacionismo</i> of Vicente Huidobro.....	16
5. Chapter 3: The Meaningful Nonsense of Gertrude Stein.....	26
6. Chapter 4: Textual Clues and the Reader’s Control.....	32
7. Chapter 5: Creation and Destruction.....	44
8. Chapter 6: The Marriage of Literary and Visual Art.....	59
9. Chapter 7: Anti-patriarchal Writing and the Formation of Identity.....	65
10. Conclusion.....	73
11. Works Cited.....	75
12. Appendix.....	78
12.1 “Paysage” by Vicente Huidobro.....	78
12.2 “Moulin” by Vicente Huidobro.....	79
12.3 “Soleil” by Vicente Huidobro.....	80
12.4 “Un astre a perdu son chemin” by Vicente Huidobro.....	81
12.5 “Kaleidoscope” by Vicente Huidobro.....	82

## Preface

Gertrude Stein was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in February of 1874. She moved with her family to Europe as an infant, returning to America in the summer of 1878. Stein lived in Baltimore and California until she moved to Paris in 1903, where she remained until her death in 1946. Her family was not poor but certainly did not belong to the social stratum occupied by Vicente Huidobro's family. Huidobro was born into an aristocratic lineage in 1893 in Santiago de Chile. Huidobro, "heir to the title Marqués de Casa Real, was earmarked for a life of leisure" (de Costa 1). Nevertheless, the poet chose to abandon his entitlements and pursue a life of philosophical and artistic insurrection.

The rebellious tendencies of both Huidobro and Stein can be attributed to the political, social, and technological uncertainties of the era in which they lived. In the time between the Civil War and the First World War in the United States, "extraordinary changes, radical transformations, were taking place; the very foundations of life as supposedly established in the New World republic were being put in doubt" (Berthoff 11). The telephone and the light bulb had been invented and the nation's first transcontinental railroad was built. While North Americans were concerned with recovering from the Civil War, Latin Americans had recently endured severe civil unrest in the Paraguayan War (1864-1870) and the War of the Pacific (1879-1883). Latin America's economic system was slowly becoming more established, "the population of Latin America doubled during the second half of the nineteenth century [. . .] and the process of urbanization quickened" (Martin 47). In Paris, technological advances were prevalent throughout society. Gas lighting became more and more scarce as electricity

gained popularity, and the “automobile was rapidly replacing horse-drawn carriages and bicycles for personal transportation” (Walz 2). The technological, social, and economic mutability of the countries in which these artists lived and worked contributed to an overarching hunger for a new kind of artistic expression.

Although the literary and artistic communities of France, Chile, and the United States underwent transitions from Romanticism to Realism to Modernism at different times during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the countries do all share a strong similarity in the artistic patterns to which they adhered. In the United States, Realism “emerged after the Civil War and became a full-fledged genre by the 1880s” (Rohrbach xiii). This artistic movement, which focused on the “minutiae of everyday life within a social and economic context” (Rohrbach xiii), continued until the rise of Naturalism around 1890. Both genres contrast with and oppose Romanticism as a “polite literature that was rotten ripe with idealizing sentiment and genteel affectation” (Berthoff 4). The straightforward, common language of Realism appears to be a rebellion against the sensational grandeur of the movement that preceded it. Modernism in the United States began around the turn of the century, breaking the habits of the Realist literary tradition by focusing on free poetic form and a fragmented, unrhymed style.

In Latin America, *modernismo* began in the late 1880s. Literary critics have noted that the publication of Rubén Darío’s *Azul* (1888) marked the start of this movement. Also a reaction to the Latin American version of *romanticismo*, *modernismo* abandoned the elaborate, romantic style to embrace instead “writing that was brief and to the point, fresh and immediate in its impact” (Martin 69). In the 1920s, as *modernismo* metamorphosed into the avant-garde, “poetry either became simpler, more conversational

and even prosaic, or much more playful, yet complex, hermetic and experimental” (Martin 113). The literary progression in Europe was more complicated than in the United States or Latin America, due in large part to the influx of foreign artists and scholars (such as Huidobro and Stein) who flocked to Parisian streets, cafés, and salons in search of the latest artistic theories and practices. Movements such as Dadaism, Symbolism, Surrealism, Imagism, Cubism, Futurism, Machinism, Ultraism, and of course, *Creacionismo*, were all part of the Modernist scene, and each enjoyed at least a brief popularity. Symbolism, pioneered by Stéphane Mallarmé, focused on “intimat[ing] things rather than stat[ing] them plainly” (Wilson 21) while attempting to capture the intricacies of feelings and sensations. Imagists like Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) dedicated their work to creating succinct, pure images while rejecting the flowery, elaborate language of Romanticism. The Futurist F.T. Marinetti claimed to be one of the “primitives of a new, completely transformed sensibility” (Marinetti, qtd. in Chipp 293), and attempted to redefine the objectives of artistic expression by rejecting artistic conventions. Founded in 1924 by André Breton, Surrealism emphasized “the superior reality of certain forms of associations hitherto neglected...the omnipotence of dream...the disinterested play of thought” (Walz 5). Each one of these movements was founded upon the artist’s fundamental desire to grow, change, and separate from the formalities of aesthetic style, and the artistic rebellion was undoubtedly influenced by the monumental changes occurring around the world.

## Introduction

Although Gertrude Stein and Vicente Huidobro both lived in Paris in the early 1900s and worked and socialized with the same people, no documented evidence exists to suggest that the two ever met, conversed, or exchanged ideas. Nevertheless, the two artists raise similar issues in their works, although they approached these subjects in distinct ways. The writings of Huidobro and Stein parallel and reflect each other in their audacious endeavors to unlock the writer, the text, and the reader from the confines of logical, rational thought. The educations, religious beliefs, social circumstances, and national and individual identities of Huidobro and Stein were remarkably distinct, yet their works reveal a shared passion for literary experimentation, linguistic manipulation, and artistic creation. The differences between the two are as countless as they are prominent, yet their differences confirm the fact that the issues with which they were concerned transcend cultural, social, gender, and religious barriers. Their concerns reflect those of the Modernist community of the time. For both writers, the destruction of conventional thought was just as essential as the creation of new methods of thought—a general feature of Modernism.

Throughout their poetry and prose, Huidobro and Stein explore the limitations and capabilities of language while resisting the accepted rules of writing and reading. Both artists were immersed in a foreign environment upon moving to Paris as adults. This immersion afforded them a fresh linguistic and cultural perspective, and their experiments with repeating sounds, avoiding typical rules of grammar, and producing works that defy coherent meaning reflect the challenges they confronted when they began to live in France. Huidobro's artistic experimentation is founded upon his theory of

*Creacionismo*. Throughout his poetry and manifestos, Huidobro asserts his belief that the poet is a “little God” and that he should use poetry to create a new reality. Significantly, the world that Huidobro creates through his poetry is separate from the reality of human existence: Huidobro’s poeticized realm “cannot be conceived of anywhere but in a book” (Huidobro, *Manifestos* 44). Although Gertrude Stein never openly practiced *Creacionismo* in her own work, her artistic philosophy resembles that of Huidobro. In Tender Buttons and Portraits and Prayers, the two works that most clearly exemplify her artistic rebellion, Stein creates a new type of literary expression by shifting the focus away from a logical message while practicing a new means of communication through what seems like nonsense. As a result, Stein’s works suggest that “*what* is told holds less importance than the process of telling and listening” (Chessman 70), and her writings suggest the existence of a new realm of communication.

While weaving sense and “nonsense” together, Stein provides textual clues that propose guidelines for understanding her work. She allows her reader to determine the interpretive outcome of her works, though the difficulty of her writings inhibits the reader’s ability to confirm any one meaning. Huidobro also encourages his readers to attempt to organize some of his most obscure poems into a logical interpretation. However, throughout his poetry, Huidobro reiterates that the poet is ultimately in control of the world he creates.

The most significant similarity between the two writers exists in their tendency to demonstrate that destruction is actually as important as creation. While forging new modes of thought, both writers dedicate their pages to destroying the boundaries of reality and the accepted rules of literature. Their poetry and prose suggest that language

as a written/spoken/heard means of communication is simultaneously inadequate and extremely powerful. Both Stein and Huidobro were fond of the visual arts, and their works demonstrate that all five senses are required in order to appreciate their writings. Their works reveal the extent to which the visual arts energize the written word while illustrating that the word itself is organic and full of infinite interpretations. Both poets strongly believed in the power of words: Huidobro claims that through words, he was able to actualize his divine creativity. While presenting unfamiliar images through unconventional language, Stein indicates that her words have the power both to conceal and reveal information about herself and her world.

Stein's tendency to hide behind her work while resisting a logical narrative structure is a manifestation of her need to come to terms with her position as a woman, lesbian, and Jew living in Europe during the World War II era. Huidobro's straightforward, aggressive style reflects his position as a wealthy male, and the subject matter of his works reveals a man who was entrenched in a struggle with his own megalomania and his anti-Christian views. Both writers resist established societal and cultural rules. While Stein avoids being confined to the guidelines of a language that was created and sustained by men (according to, among others, the French feminist writers Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous), Huidobro renounces the Christian belief in the existence of an omnipotent heavenly father. Therefore, both Huidobro's and Stein's works are anti-patriarchal in their rejections of established customs and beliefs.

Although their writings certainly reflect similar goals, their styles are quite different. Huidobro explicitly and aggressively declares his convictions in his poems. He writes candidly of discovering new horizons, leaving the old ways behind, and

rejecting Christianity by establishing an unconventional religion that is primarily based upon the poet's divine power. Stein's works are equally ground-breaking; however, her approach is much more covert than Huidobro's. She focuses more on technique and less on subject matter. Though it would be inaccurate to consider her shy or timid, she did seem to hide behind her art, using what appears to be nonsensical or coded language while writing "autobiographies" about her own life and entitling them The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1932) and Everybody's Autobiography (1937). Her works do not explicitly reveal the true personality of the "real" Gertrude Stein; therefore, as readers, we are tempted to question the relationship between the surface and what exists underneath the surface, with respect to both Stein and her writings.

The works of Gertrude Stein and Vicente Huidobro have not yet been analyzed together in a critical context, even though their literary concerns were strikingly similar. Using linguistic and artistic experimentation as the foundation for their works, Stein and Huidobro helped to redefine literature. Their common interests despite dissimilar backgrounds invite us to consider how the broader implications of their works help to shape our understanding of the Modernist era. Stein's and Huidobro's destructive *Creacionismo* suggests that the era in which they lived was defined by an overarching desire to forge ahead into the future while dismissing the past.

## Chapter 1: Geographical Displacement

The literary creations of Huidobro and Stein focus on establishing a new medium of poetic expression through a painstaking examination of language. Both Huidobro's and Stein's heightened sensitivities to the way words sound originate from their geographical displacements. Both writers moved to Paris as adults after having lived elsewhere for the majority of their lives. Stein's immersion in the language and culture of Paris certainly contributed to her enhanced awareness of the sights and sounds that a native of France might take for granted. Her foreign environment forced her to consider the world in a different way, and probably contributed to her tendency to separate words from their meanings. J. Gerald Kennedy explains this phenomenon most clearly:

Surrounded by French, she experienced a double estrangement: the *langue étrangère* literally imposed a strangeness upon daily experience through its radical renaming of the phenomenal world; this renaming problematized the relationship between words and things and thus disclosed to her the previously imperceptible strangeness—the arbitrary formulations—of her native tongue. (Kennedy 73)

Being inundated with the phonetics of a language without being familiar with the meanings of words causes one to recognize the sound of every word, while being forced to appreciate the sound completely separate from the meaning. Though she lived in Europe as a young girl, Stein knew only “odds and ends of German and French” (Brinnin 8). After living in America for 25 years, she moved to Paris in 1903 to live with her brother Leo. After some time there, she eventually “spoke colloquial French with ease though never with native fluency or correctness” (Kennedy 72). Stein declared in no

uncertain terms that English was her language of choice, and she suggests that she “needed the linguistic otherness of Paris to discover an intimate and original relationship to her native tongue” (Kennedy 72):

There is for me only one language and that is english. One of the things that I have liked all these years is to be surrounded by people who know no english. It has left me more intensely alone with my eyes and my english. I do not know if it would have been possible to have english be so all in all to me otherwise. (Stein, qtd. in Kennedy 72)

Although Stein spoke with some of her friends in English, she was surrounded by the French language and was forced to separate the sounds of French words from their meanings. Her experience with French carried over into her work: “only in the context of linguistic difference, perhaps, could Stein have become so responsive to the oddities of English usage or to the quirks of its grammatical structure” (Kennedy 73). In her writings, she attempts to separate English words from their meanings: “I took individual words [. . .] and put them next to another word and at this same time I found out very soon that there is no such thing as putting them together without sense [. . .]. I made innumerable efforts to make words write without sense and found it impossible” (Stein, qtd. in Maubrey-Rose 14). Although she acknowledged that in English, this kind of separation is impossible, Stein must have been able to separate sound and meaning when she moved to France. Her time in Paris influenced the way she regarded language. Visiting cafés, walking along Parisian streets, and being completely surrounded by the French language in a way that she never had been before must have impressed upon Stein the extent to which language is merely a collection of sounds, or a grouping of phonetic

pieces broken down and paired with other phonemes to build a system of communication. She gradually made sounds and syllables the focus of her work, and her “continual preoccupation with words and sentences rather than with larger units of discourse may have been a direct result of her long immersion in a foreign environment” (Kennedy 73).

Throughout Portraits and Prayers and Tender Buttons, Stein calls attention to the minute details of language and sound in a way that suggests her own achievement of a new perspective. Kennedy underscores the significant influence that Stein’s foreign environment must have had on her ability to recognize the “previously imperceptible strangeness—the arbitrary formulations—of her native tongue” (Kennedy 73). Stein was capable of taking a step away from everyday language and studying the components of the words by focusing only on the way they sound. She attempted to strip them of their denotations, a practice that reverses the process of connecting words to denotations when one is learning to speak a new language.

Any discussion of the relationship between words and their meanings would be incomplete without referring to the renowned theories of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. The linguistic theories he presented publicly in the early 1900s help to elucidate the foundations of language. According to Saussure, language is “a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas” (Saussure 10). The bond between the sound-image (signifier) and the idea (signified), is “arbitrary”; Saussure asserts that a concept “is not linked by any inner relationship to the succession of sounds” that refer to it (Saussure 67). The actual bond between a concept and sound-image varies among different languages, and thus, among different societies and cultures. Furthermore, we learn the language we speak, (or, we learn to make the socially accepted connections

between sounds and images), from members of our community: “the individual must always serve an apprenticeship in order to learn the functioning of language; a child assimilates it only gradually” (Saussure 14). Stein’s immersion in a foreign environment “problematized the relationship between words and things” (Kennedy 73), and her experiments with separating sound-images from concepts are influenced by her relationship with the French language.

As previously discussed, Stein’s experiments with the sounds in the English language allow her readers to behold words in an entirely new light while providing evidence of the ways in which human beings assimilate language. Throughout her work, Stein continues to obscure the connection between signifier and signified. She uses sound-images like “sea” and “see,” “have” and “halve,” and “two” and “to,” grouping them together not necessarily because of the concepts to which they correspond, but rather because of the way they look and sound. The concepts are irrelevant; all that is relevant to Stein is the fact that the similarly-sounding words do *not* share similar concepts. Stein has begun to fracture the link between signifier and signified by attempting to disconnect sound-images (signifiers) from their concepts (signifieds). The implications of her experimental writings are extensive due to the fact that, through her work, she challenges the underpinnings of the very linguistic system through which she expresses herself. Many of her writings reveal Stein’s exhaustive examination of each word she chose to employ. Her works illustrate her ability to distance herself from her linguistic tools while continuing to use them to create.

\*\*\*

The time Huidobro spent immersed in the French language certainly contributed to his passion for experimenting with words in many contexts. Huidobro was unfamiliar with French when he relocated to Paris in 1916: “I knew very little of the language but I quickly overcame this deficiency” (Huidobro, *Manifestos* 58). Through poems like “Paysage,” “Un astre a perdu son chemin,” and “Moulin,” Huidobro exhibits the way human beings learn and practice language. For example, when one is surrounded by a foreign language for the first time, the bonds between word and object are fragile; the connection between signifier and signified is shaky and unclear. When adults learn a new language by means of immersion, they are forced to reconsider aspects of their native language that they previously took for granted.

Huidobro lived in Chile and spoke Spanish from his childhood. His relationship with the Spanish language in Chile was quite different from his relationship to the French language in France. While Huidobro was living in Chile, the objects around him did not necessarily conjure up conscious awareness of the words that defined them. This can be attributed to the fact that the connection between a sound/image and a concept in one’s native language seems natural, so the distinction between word and thing is not as prominent. While Huidobro was living in France, however, a glance at the moon might invoke the French word for moon, “lune.” In the mind that is trying to learn a new language, the relationships between words (signifiers) and the objects they represent (signifieds) are in the forefront, precisely because the process of learning a new language includes learning to connect objects with the words that represent them in that particular language. In fact, the process of learning a new language is centered to a large extent on memorizing the relationship between signified and signifier, between words and objects,

whereas this relationship is generally taken for granted when one learns a language at an early age. The child learning that the word “moon” stands for the white object he or she sees in the night sky will likely not question this information, but rather accept it and take it as “natural” fact.

Throughout his assimilation into the French language, Huidobro practiced writing poetry in French, and his underdeveloped relationship with the language afforded him a new perspective on the communicative power of language in poetry. The poet comments on this phenomenon almost ten years after he first began living in France: “Have you noticed the special power, the almost creative ambiance, which surrounds poetry written in a language which you are just beginning to babble? You find marvelous some poems which later give you a giggle” (Huidobro, *Manifestos* 59). When Huidobro moved to France and was immersed in a different language, he was forced to reconsider the relationships between words and objects in both Spanish and in French. The same can be said of Stein, though while Stein emphasized the rift between signifier and signified by attempting to empty words of their conventional meanings, Huidobro attempted to facilitate the connection using shapes made from words. In “Paysage,” “Moulin,” “Soleil,” and “Un astre a perdu son chemin,” Huidobro forges a strong “connection between vision and meaning” (Quiroga 36). His poems reinforce “the fact that words have the power to create more than the sum of their signifieds” (Quiroga 36).

The theory that geographical circumstances may have influenced Stein’s and Huidobro’s works helps to elucidate both writers’ experiments with language. Both Huidobro and Stein, upon being immersed in a foreign language for extended periods, became more cognizant of the words, titles, and descriptions (in the form of words) that

were attached to everything around them in their new environment. Therefore, Huidobro's "Paysage" seems to be a reflection of his apparent ability to see words as the tiny ingredients that make up everything around him. Rather than drawing a picture of the images in his mind and then using a separate piece of paper to write a poem about the images, he mixes the two together. By keeping the words visible within the shapes he makes in his poetry, he presents the words as the particles of matter that construct the images. He illustrates his own perception of his environment by ensuring that words maintain a primary role in the portrait.

In "Paysage" and "Moulin," Huidobro succeeds in achieving a balance between words and objects. For example, in "Paysage," objects acquire the shapes of the words that represent them. The moon in the upper right corner of the page is comprised of more than just the word "lune." It is circular, the shape of the full moon. In a similar way, the "river that flows" actually appears to flow in Huidobro's poem, moving down the page in a fluid, liquid motion. Huidobro seeks to solidify the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified by securing more than one connection. He does not rely on the rules of linguistics to connect the word and the object; instead, he reinforces this connection by providing a visual bridge between the two. For example, in "Paysage" the word "lune" is understood as the object it represents not simply because the word has been connected with the actual object throughout the history of the French language (in accordance with the rules of linguistics), but also because of the shape in which "lune" and its modifiers appear. A similar phenomenon occurs with the word "fleuve," or "river." The connection between "fleuve" and the object it symbolizes is strengthened by the river-like shape in which the word appears. The shapes that resemble a river and a

moon act as catalysts and allow for a smooth transition between the words and their referents. Huidobro uses his poetry to enhance the association between signifier and signified, an association that was obstructed when the poet was suddenly surrounded by a foreign language. These examples of what Huidobro called “poème-peint” take on their “fullest meaning in the process of being read and seen at the same time” (de Costa 53). In order to appreciate their messages, one must actively read and observe the text. In this way, the “poème-peint” encourages a close, one-on-one relationship between the poem and the reader/observer. “Paysage,” “Un astre a perdu son chemin,” and “Moulin” exemplify the potential power of a work that explores the union of visual and literary artistic expression.

## Chapter 2: Poetic Reality and the *Creacionismo* of Vicente Huidobro

While Huidobro's relationship with a foreign language inspired him to endorse a multi-sensual poetic experience, his theory of *Creacionismo* provides the foundation for the majority of his works. By way of *Creacionismo*, Huidobro claims that the poet is capable of building new worlds through poetry. Huidobro's philosophy is twofold. First, the poet believed in "adopting... a new concept of the Word—the Word as essence of all life, the very mystery of creation" (Wood 13). Huidobro declared his decision to focus more on the "significación mágica" ("magical significance") and less on the "significación gramatical" ("grammatical significance") of language (Huidobro, qtd. in Wood 13). In his manifesto *La poesía*, Huidobro declared that the poet should discover the "palabra interna" ("inner word") that exists underneath the surface of every word, and he emphasized his conviction that only through the "inner word" will the poet discover the creative capabilities of language. The second tenet of *Creacionismo* is that through this new language, poets will achieve the power "to bring new worlds into being" (Wood 14). In perhaps his most famous poem, "Arte poética" ("Poetic Art"), published in 1916, Huidobro explains his poetic philosophy:

Let the verse be as a key  
Opening a thousand doors.  
A leaf falls; something is flying by;  
Let whatever your eyes gaze upon be created,  
And the soul of the hearer remain shivering.  
Invent new worlds and watch over your word;  
The adjective, when not a life-giver, kills.

We are in the cycle of nerves.  
 Like a memory  
 The muscle hangs in the museums;  
 Nevertheless, we have no less strength:  
 True vigor  
 Dwells in the head.  
 Why do you sing to the rose, oh Poets!  
 Make it blossom in the poem;  
 Only for us  
 Live all things under the Sun.  
 The poet is a little God. (Huidobro, *The Poet* 5)

This poem is the first in the collection *El espejo de agua* (1916), and the final line of the poem is perhaps Huidobro's best known. In this one statement, Huidobro captures his philosophy of *Creacionismo*, asserting simultaneously his divine power to create and his desire to denounce, destroy, and redefine the Christian beliefs with which he was raised. He suggests his power over nature by urging his fellow poets to control a flower by "mak[ing] it blossom in the poem," while simultaneously suggesting that the world in which this flower will bloom is separate from, though parallel to, the real, tangible world. By asserting that "the verse" is a key to be used for "opening a thousand doors," Huidobro again declares his belief in the poet's ability to unveil comparable realities. The "thousand doors" presumably lead to other universes, realms that only poets are capable of discovering. Huidobro's faith in the poet's divinely-inspired literary superiority over the reader is evident. He addresses his fellow poets directly, asserting,

“Only for us / live all things under the sun.” Additionally, he distinguishes between the poet and his audience by writing that the reader/hearer will be left awe-struck and “shivering” upon experiencing the poem, implying a relationship like that between a human being and a god. The poem argues for the elite and super-human creative capabilities of a poet, and it refutes the creative capabilities of nature and the Christian God. By suggesting that creation is so uncomplicated that human beings can achieve it, Huidobro destroys the typical notion of one all-powerful God. Huidobro renounces the Christian God while asserting his own divinity throughout his epic poem *Altazor* (1931) as well as in many of his shorter poems in *El espejo de agua* (1916), *Poemas árticos* (1918), *Ecuatorial* (1918), and *Temblor de cielo* (1931). In all of these works, the more subversive, covert acts of destruction are crucial to the development of the theme of creation, as well as to the believability of the poet’s status as creator and “little God.”

Huidobro creates new realities through the images in his poetry, and his theory of *Creacionismo* takes different forms throughout his work. Like Stein, Huidobro also encouraged a new way of reading. For example, Huidobro’s poems “Moulin” and “Paysage” are more than merely words on a page; the shapes in which they are organized turn the works into something more than poems, something more like paintings made out of words. Huidobro’s decision to create shapes from words remains consistent with his theory of *Creacionismo*. Rather than separate a written work from the images it describes, Huidobro chooses to identify the words with concepts, the signifiers with signifieds, thus creating a new realm that is distinct from our reality. As he professes in his philosophy of *Creacionismo*, the universe he creates from words does not exist within conventional reality, but, rather, it is parallel to this reality. Therefore, to translate that

reality into a “photographic” reproduction would be to contradict the theories of *Creacionismo*. Huidobro stresses that the world he creates in his poetry is understood only in the context of his poetry, and that, in fact, a poem “cannot be conceived anywhere but in a book” (Huidobro, *Manifestos* 44). The techniques he uses in “Paysage,” “Moulin,” and “Un astre a perdu son chemin” illustrate the process through which Huidobro “creates” both his poems and the worlds they represent. He seems to take elements from his environment and filter them through his poetry into an entirely new representation of reality, one that is only very loosely based on the world in which he lives. In his controversial manifesto *Non serviam*, Huidobro expresses his disenchantment with Mother Nature, and asserts his right to create new worlds that have little resemblance to the natural, earthly world:

We have accepted without much reflection the notion that there can be no other realities except those which are all around us, and it never occurred to us that we too could create new realities in a world of our own making, in a world that would need its own flora and fauna. A flora and fauna that only the poet can create, using that special power that Mother Nature gave to him and him alone.

*Non serviam*. I don't have to be your slave, Mother Nature; I shall be your master [. . .]. I'll have my own trees that won't be like yours; I'll have my own mountains. I'll have my rivers and seas, I'll have my sky and my stars. And you won't be able to say to me: ‘This tree is not very good, I don't like that sky; mine are better.’ I would reply that my skies

are of my own making and not yours, and that there is no reason at all why they have to look alike. (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 33)

The world that Huidobro creates is an “unfamiliar-familiar” world (Kern xxi). He uses familiar images in unfamiliar ways, thus causing the reader to teeter on the brink of the reality of the natural world and that of Huidobro’s new realm. Huidobro’s poems are not comprised of pure fantasy, though at times the universe he describes in his poems seems illogical and implausible. The power of his work seems to come in large part from his ability to remain focused on what is real while venturing into an uninhabited, unvisited realm of the fantastic. In this respect, his writing is reminiscent of Stein’s: both writers provide enough clues to keep their readers engaged and connected to the text while exploring new, seemingly nonsensical, relationships between words and images. The result with Huidobro’s work, as with Stein’s, is an engaged, though at times insecure, reader.

Bizarre images woven throughout Huidobro’s poetry invite the reader to hazard a guess at what the poet might have meant, though the reader is unable to base his or her interpretation on anything that resembles real life. For example, in the poem “Horas” (“Hours”) from *Poemas árticos*, Huidobro writes “In every puddle / deaf stars are sleeping.” While René de Costa argues that the stars are “light years away, brought to earth by their reflection in a puddle” (de Costa 61), the possibility exists that, in the world Huidobro has created throughout this and other poems in the same collection, the stars are more than just reflected. Huidobro’s collection includes numerous accounts of stars visiting the earth and earthlings visiting the heavens, and his poetry suggests that in his “illogical,” fantastically real world, stars can actually slide away from their

constellations in the skies, descend to earth, and slumber in puddles. If this world seems unrealistic, that is precisely the point. Huidobro does not want us to be able to compare his poetic domain to our “real” universe, for as Huidobro states:

A poem is [. . .] not beautiful out of nostalgia, it isn't beautiful because we recall some things seen which were beautiful, nor because it describes beautiful things that we have the possibility of seeing. It is beautiful in itself and it doesn't admit to terms of comparison. It cannot be conceived anywhere but in a book. (Huidobro, *Manifestos* 44)

If we cannot compare Huidobro's poetic world with anything we as readers know to be true, then how are we to understand his work? Are the stars actually on earth, or are they being reflected? The images are familiar, yet also unfamiliar enough for us to remain unsure about the way to read Huidobro's poetry. We have enough logical information to enable us to hazard a tentative guess, yet our suspicions will not be confirmed, and we are left just where Huidobro wants us to be: somewhere *in between* our known, comfortable, “real” world, and the familiarly fantastic world that he has created on the page. Yet in the midst of our confusing, frustrating, and insecure feelings that all seem to appear when disentangling such difficult texts, another phenomenon occurs, one that happens with Stein's works as well. As readers, we find ourselves pleasantly surprised by feelings of exhilaration as we uncover connections between two images that we would previously have thought to be nonsensical. We begin to see the world (both our “real” world and Huidobro's imaginary realm) from a different perspective, and as with Stein's works, we receive small, interspersed moments of victory when we make a connection or hazard a guess at an interpretation that seems to work.

Both writers seem to have found a balance between the logical and illogical, between sense and nonsense, between the real and the unreal, a balance that is so effective that it simultaneously pushes readers away and draws them into the text even more deeply.

In an unpublished manuscript, Huidobro elaborates on his experience with the fantastic and the real:

I had made a poem; but it didn't please me. I made two, three, four, at least ten, but there was something wrong. None satisfied me [...]. And after terrible days of great depression, without knowing how, one night, going over the latest poems I had written, it came to me like a flash of light. I realized what was wrong. The reason was simple. As happens with any new thing, I had been exaggerating and had fallen into an extreme. To create everything, to distance myself from reality, I had gone over to pure fantasy, the fantastic, as repugnant and dangerous as realism, and generally grotesque. Then I saw that I had to dance between these two traps: the Fantastic and the Real, without falling into either. And the principal problem was resolved. (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 40)

Huidobro's "dance" is illustrated throughout *El espejo de agua*, *Poemas árticos* and *Ecuatorial*. Huidobro's world is one that we as readers can almost imagine; the familiar images in unfamiliar situations allow us to approach an understanding of the universe the poet describes. Yet if we cannot grasp the world entirely, our misapprehension is not due to any negligence on Huidobro's part. In "Arte poética," Huidobro instructs other poets to "Invent new worlds and care for your word" (Huidobro, *The Poet* 5). Huidobro follows his own directions in his poetry; the world he creates in

the very first poem is tended to and cultivated throughout the three collections. Images appear and reappear, themes remain constant, and we are able to gain an idea, albeit a little foggy, of the type of world Huidobro set out to create. In these collections of poems, Huidobro describes a world in which “leaves are weeping” (Huidobro, *The Poet* 9), “the horizon speaks” (9), “wind weeps in the pond” (15), “deaf stars are sleeping” (27), “a hundred airplanes fly around the moon” (35), “electric stars / ignite in the wind” (39), “all the stars have fallen” and are “hanging from the branches” (49), “the trees have ears” (71), and “the moon ticks like a clock” (81). Huidobro intentionally chose to use present-tense verbs in order to make the reader feel as if the actions in the poem are occurring as one is reading. He uses verbs to “arrest action or, alternately, to give the idea of a perpetual, almost frozen-in-time stasis to the scene” (de Costa 60).

Quite a few recurring images appear throughout *El espejo de agua*, *Poemas árticos*, and *Ecuatorial*, most of which describe a universe in which the boundaries between earth and sky are difficult or impossible to decipher. The characters in these poems hold stars in their hands; the stars slide in and out of the sky, visit the sea and the earth, and then climb back into their places in the constellations: “some astrological signs / have fallen to the sea” (Huidobro, *The Poet* 39). In a similar way, the speaker in the poems interacts with the elements of the skies, declaring that the clouds are “wet with my tears” (55) and stating: “a cloud traveled on my lips” (101), and “I have in my hand / the native sky” (65). While “airplanes fly around the moon” (35), Huidobro describes other technological machines visiting the heavens and beyond: “on the way to other constellations / The train breaking off from the stars / Cuts through the night” (119). Throughout these poems, Huidobro consistently describes people with wings while

referring to “wingless” birds or to birds with broken wings. Additionally, Huidobro fills his poems with references to flying and falling, birds, stars, smoke, and wind. He writes of moving beyond the horizon in almost every poem in the three collections.

The world created by Huidobro, exquisitely fantastic yet strangely familiar, is one in which the inhabitants of the heavens and of the earth interact with each other. The boundaries that exist in “reality” between the earth and the skies seem to disappear entirely in Huidobro’s poems. Considering Huidobro’s preoccupation with the notion that the poet is a “little God,” it seems as if the technique he uses throughout his Creationist poetry (especially *El espejo de agua*, *Poemas árticos*, and *Ecuatorial*) is intentionally focused on bringing together the realms in which gods and humans exist. By fusing the two realms in his own created world, he gives more credibility to the idea that the poet would be able to produce the worlds he claims to create. Huidobro creates a world that is conducive to human-divine interaction. His world seems to reflect his views about the distance between poets and gods; in *Non serviam* as well as throughout other manifestos, Huidobro emphasizes his conviction that poets have been given special skills, and that they have been bequeathed the ability to perform divine functions. Therefore, in light of Huidobro’s views, it seems fitting that he would envision a world in which the heavens and the earth are not separate, in which the earth and sky are interchangeable, in which “the world has changed places / And false stars shine in the sky” (Huidobro, *The Poet* 111).

The worlds that Huidobro creates throughout *El espejo de agua*, *Poemas árticos*, and *Ecuatorial* can exist only at the expense of rational thought. In order to entertain the notion that a poet is capable of creating a realm that is “real,” we must suspend our

disbelief and learn to approach a new understanding of how we read poetry. Huidobro's *Creacionismo* "stresses that rationality should be abandoned. This doctrine—superficially, one must emphasize—rejects traditional poetry" (Francis 313). Therefore, if we are to accept that Huidobro's endeavors are at least somewhat worth our time, if we are to entertain the idea that the poet has the divine power to create, we must first destroy what we know to be true about the universe and the reality in which we live. Huidobro offers his readers some assistance in approaching a transformation in thought of this magnitude: "If man has submitted to the three kingdoms of nature, the mineral kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, and the animal kingdom, for what reason could he not add to the kingdoms of the universe his own kingdom, the kingdom of his own creations?" (Huidobro, *Antología* 112, my translation). Huidobro asks us to recognize his creation by destroying all we know about metaphysics and religion. Obviously, this kind of re-adjustment is extraordinarily difficult to accept. This parallel, almost symbiotic relationship between destruction and creation appears throughout Huidobro's literary works.

### **Chapter 3: The Meaningful Nonsense of Gertrude Stein**

In a similar way, Gertrude Stein destroys and then creates from her destruction throughout her writings. She breaks words and concepts up into pieces and then unites them into a more or less coherent whole. She emphasizes the nonsense in the world in order to highlight the sense of the world. While Huidobro challenges his readers to venture into the fantastic realities of the worlds he creates through his poetry, Stein challenges her readers to abandon their realms of comfort and to entertain the notion that discomfort and frustration can lead to new understanding. Both writers urge their readers to journey into a new realm of comprehension. The themes throughout Stein's work emphasize destroying, challenging, or questioning the established rules. Specifically, Stein's revolutionary literature focuses on three main areas: language, the reader's relationship with the text, and literature's connection to the visual arts. She challenges the way literature is typically written and read by encouraging an awareness of the inherent connection between visual and written art, and by extending the boundaries of the expressive potential of literary art. She explores the capacity of each word she uses, paying close attention to every minute detail of her message. She redefines the relationship between the reader and the text by requiring her reader to interpret, question, and interact with the words on the page in an unconventional way.

In her book *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (1983), Marianne DeKoven calls Stein's style "experimental writing." DeKoven notes that quite a few other writers, a significant number of whom were Stein's contemporaries, have explored the myriad labyrinths of "experimental writing." James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, William Burroughs, and Donald Barthelme all voyaged, at various

points in their careers, into the kind of writing that obstructs a “normal reading” (DeKoven 5). DeKoven emphasizes, however, that while the vast majority of Stein’s works can be described as “experimental writing,” this kind of writing was not always the norm for Joyce, Woolf, Beckett, Burroughs, or Barthelme. The sheer volume of Stein’s experimental works and her matter-of-fact tone when writing about what seems like nonsense to most people sets her apart from other experimental authors, both past and present.

DeKoven’s analyses of Stein’s works are invaluable in establishing the difference between Stein’s texts and “non-experimental” (DeKoven 6) writing. In order to appreciate and understand Stein’s unique style, we must first establish what we consider to be “normal reading” (DeKoven 5) and then examine her tendency to break away from literary conventions. DeKoven offers a clear explanation of the uncommon characteristics of Stein’s literary experimentation: “The unifying feature of experimental writing is [. . .] the obstruction of normal reading. It prevents us from interpreting the writing to form coherent, single, whole, closed, ordered, finite, sensible meanings” (DeKoven 5). While the search for meaning is the primary focus in the majority of literary works, Stein’s writings encourage her readers to shift their focus away from meaning. Her texts call for a different kind of interpretation: “what requires analysis [. . .] is the style rather than the work” (DeKoven xv). As a result, her texts cultivate a new relationship between the reader and the work. Rather than pursuing a comprehension of the work as a whole, Stein’s reader must instead concentrate on the details of the text. Stein forces her readers to slow down and consider the way words look, sound, and interact with each other. Having eliminated the ultimate objective of overall comprehension, Stein suggests that

the journey is more important than the destination. Her works impel us to focus on each step of the journey through her writings rather than on a final goal of understanding the text as whole.

In her efforts to pull her readers away from coherent meaning, Stein experiments with the phonetic structure of language. She highlights the extent to which language is merely a collection of sounds. While underscoring the concept that the English language is a system of signs comprised of phonetic sounds and verbal images, Stein continues to experiment with encouraging a new kind of relationship between the reader and the text, one that differs from the “normal reading” that DeKoven describes. She consistently forces the reader to question how he or she relates to the words and phrases, ultimately disrupting any secure, steady connection between reader and text. The reader must constantly alter his or her grasp of the work, succumbing to second-guesses, ambiguities, and insecurities along the way. Stein requires her readers to become engaged in the text, and she challenges them to re-think, re-learn, and re-evaluate their interpretations of her works, while reconsidering the nature of language and art in general.

Stein’s writings force us to challenge the way we see the world. She encourages active participation from her readers. Her often perplexing writings engage the senses, recall memories, demand analysis, incite confusion, and urge the reader to re-think and reevaluate all that we take for granted each day. Stein creates her experiential literature by deconstructing the search for meaning and by experimenting with language and sounds. All human beings communicate with each other using some form of language, and most of us learned the languages we speak early in life. Furthermore, effective communication depends entirely on our ability to understand others and express

ourselves effectively. Through her writings, Stein has called upon us to modify our relationships with language, communication, and the quest for comprehension. She urges us to re-channel our knowledge and our habitual practices in another direction, and this task is difficult and unpleasant, much as learning how to eat with our feet would be. We resist, struggle, question, challenge, and ultimately, we learn to recognize the existence of “sense” in the “nonsense” of her communication. Her writings suggest the value inherent in challenging the rules of language, creative expression, and artistic interpretation. Only by first challenging and disrupting the way that the reader interacts with a text can the ground be laid for a new type of relationship. A phase of destruction must occur prior to the phase of creation. Her texts require readers to feel uncomfortable with the cryptic prose before they can feel good about arriving at an interpretation in the midst of confusion. As a result, we emerge from studying Stein’s works with an elevated sensitivity to the parts of our language, a clearer perspective of our desire for a logical message, and an increased appreciation for the power of art.

\*\*\*

Stein calls upon her readers to embrace a form of communication that relies upon both rational thought *and* what appears to be nonsense. She seems to tease her readers with what at first seems like logical, coherent storytelling, then proceeds to frustrate the reader’s complacency by merging into a realm of unintelligible writing. An excellent example of such a process appears in her 1927 portrait of Juan Gris entitled “The Life and Death of Juan Gris.” This rather brief portrait begins with what seems to be a comprehensible narrative about the Spanish painter:

Juan Gris was one of the younger children of a well-to-do merchant of Madrid. The earliest picture he has of himself is at about five years of age dressed in a little lace dress standing beside his mother who was very sweet and pleasantly maternal-looking. When he was about seven years old his father failed in business honorably and the family fell upon very hard times but in one way and another two sons and a daughter lived to grow up well educated and on the whole prosperous. (Stein, *Portraits* 48)

Although the absence of commas in the first part of this portrait is consistent with Stein's typical disregard for grammar, the story is intelligible and flows in chronological order. However, a mere sixteen sentences later, the coherent narrative melts into an abstract, incomprehensible collection of adjectives that presumably modify a woman whose identity or relationship to Gris is never actually discussed in the portrait: "Josette equable intelligent spontaneous delicate courageous delightful forethoughtful the school of Fontainebleau delicate deliberate measured and free of all these things seduced" (Stein, *Portraits* 49). Stein compiles the portrait by juxtaposing disconnected fragments of nouns and adjectives with her earlier coherent narrative, thereby emphasizing the notion that incoherent and coherent thoughts work together to produce reality.

Ironically, although "The Life and Death of Juan Gris" shifts back and forth between apparent senselessness ("And so he made it very well loving and he made it with plainly playing. And he liked a knife and all but reasonably" [Stein, *Portraits* 50]) and plain English, Stein's portrait does create a relatively coherent image of Juan Gris. The portrait provides the reader with a minimal understanding of the artist's life, though it mentions nothing about his death, as the title suggests. The portrait does not present a

full, comprehensive explanation of Gris's career, yet it does leave us with clear images of his childhood in Madrid, his opinions about French culture, and his close friendship with Stein. Therefore, although Stein begins her portrait by "producing phrases that approximate the language of conventional discourse only to slide into seeming nonsense" (Kennedy 55), her technique seems to focus specifically on juxtaposing the two realms of sense and nonsense in order to highlight the communicative possibilities that exist between them. She ruptures the normal, coherent mode of narrative in an effort to call attention to the existence of other avenues of expression. Although Stein's portrait appears to melt into utter inanity, "its purpose is not simply to 'wipe out sense,' but to suggest other ways of making sense" (Chessman 72). By managing to convey feelings and character traits about Juan Gris through a language that, if it were not positioned alongside comprehensive prose, might be dismissed as gibberish, Stein encourages her readers to reevaluate the way they have communicated and been communicated with. In fact, the nonsensical portions of the text seem to be elucidated by the intelligible prose beside which they are placed, and vice versa. When contrasted with an illogical statement, a logical statement seems to make more sense. Conversely, an illogical statement that is presented by itself might be overlooked or dismissed as nonsense. When this "nonsense" appears alongside logical writing, the reader cannot help but recognize that the author's placement of obscure writing next to intelligible writing is intentional, and that the contrast between distinct styles in fact emphasizes the unique characteristics of each style. By employing the two types of discourse in her work, she forces them to work together to create one whole picture. What results is an image that is the relatively coherent fusion of many disparate, unintelligible pieces.

#### **Chapter 4: Textual Clues and the Reader's Control**

Just as Stein's use of "nonsense" impels her readers to venture into a new realm of literary analysis, through Huidobro's *Creacionismo*, he urges readers to embark on an imaginative journey into his poetic realm. During the course of these journeys, both authors provide information regarding how to approach their obscure texts, while allowing the reader to assume an active, albeit limited, role in determining the significance of the complex works. Stein anticipates her readers' feelings of disillusionment and confusion, and then takes advantage of their befuddled conditions by offering clues and condolences when they most fervently want to find them. Tender Buttons and Portraits and Prayers offer many examples of this technique. While shattering the typical notion of meaning and causing readers to reevaluate what they hope to derive from a text, Stein inserts what seem to be clues about how to read her work. For example, after a string of incomprehensible phrases in her portrait "Monsieur Vollard et Cézanne," Stein writes, "By this I mean by this I mean, am I in it" (Stein, *Portraits* 38). A disorientated reader may feel relieved upon encountering this phrase; it claims to offer an idea of what Stein "means." However, she continues the portrait in the same manner in which she began, stringing seemingly dissimilar and illogical phrases together: "Clouds are some warmth by the tall chimney. / This is not a vision. / Clothes are a vision. / Birds are Mexico" (Stein, *Portraits* 39). What seemed at first to be an explanation of her meaning, or at least some sort of clarification that might help elucidate the difficult reading, turns out to be a clever way of emphasizing the lack of meaning in her text.

In a similar way, her portrait “Cézanne” defies meaning by claiming to mean something: “In this way we have a place to stay and he was not met because he was settled to stay. When I said settled I meant settled to stay. When I said settled to stay I meant settled to stay Saturday. In this way a mouth is a mouth” (Stein, *Portraits* 11). Stein refers back to her previous words under the guise of clarifying them, yet her clarification leads only to more confusion, and what she “meant” remains buried under repetitions and disjointed references. However, in the same way that her juxtaposition of gibberish with relatively “logical” narrative in “The Life and Death of Juan Gris” ultimately emphasizes both the communicative power and the limitations inherent in both forms of discourse, in “Cézanne,” Stein’s quasi-intelligible claim that her unintelligible chatter actually “means” something draws attention to the possibility that her words and phrases are not random at all. Conversely, however, this technique simultaneously highlights the elusiveness of meaning—and even the possibility that meaning might not exist at all. The dual interpretations inherent in Stein’s work give way to doubt and insecurity in the reader. If we as readers cannot even understand Stein’s meaning when she seems to be pointing it out to us, what sort of progress, if any, have we made in reading her text? Her insistence that meaning exists somewhere in her seemingly muddled work causes the reader to wonder if Stein intends to call attention to her meaning, or lack thereof. She draws the reader back into intelligible reality for a split second, interrupting the flow of nonsense to interject a small kernel of sense, only to return again to her confusing prattle. Her technique reorganizes and revolutionizes the way in which books are typically read because it subordinates the search for meaning. By using a montage of words and phrases in lieu of a linear, chronological text, Stein

wages an “attack on the formal coherence of the novel” (Schmitz 117) and urges her readers to question the extent to which they rely on logical meaning to understand a literary work. As a result, the experience of reading Gertrude Stein’s writing is often frustrating, uncomfortable, and awkward. As readers, we are urged to erase all we have been taught about the way to receive and digest art.

Perhaps because Stein’s “meaning” is difficult or even impossible to decipher, many critics have suggested that her texts consist of coded language. The superficial chaos of Tender Buttons encourages in some readers an assumption that a secret order lies beneath the apparent randomness. As she does in her portraits, throughout Tender Buttons Stein seems to play with her reader by hinting at clues that may, or may not, actually hold any valuable explanatory information about her text. Consider the state of the reader when he or she stumbles across the “clues” hidden throughout Tender Buttons. Baffled by the illogical combinations of words and images, and eager to discover some direction the text, a curious and confused reader might believe that certain phrases in the first few pages of Tender Buttons provide information about how to read the text that lies ahead. In the first section of Tender Buttons entitled “A Carafe, That is a Blind Glass,” Stein writes, “A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and *an arrangement in a system to pointing*. All this and not ordinary, *not unordered in not resembling*. The difference is spreading” (Stein, *Tender* 3, my italics). Having been provided this information in the very first section of Stein’s elusive text, the reader might wonder if the sections, phrases, or words contained in the book might actually be arranged “in a system.” Are these seemingly disparate images and unlikely groupings “pointing” to something? The hint at an “arrangement” in “A Carafe, That is a

Blind Glass” suggests that the apparent nonsense we are about to read is not nonsense at all, and that instead, although the nouns, verbs, and adjectives are “not resembling,” they are “not unordered.” Stein continues to intersperse allusions to orderliness throughout her text, writing “there is no mistake” and “very likely it is reasonable” (Stein, *Tender* 4), and reiterating the suggestion that “all this which is a system” (Stein, *Tender* 6) just might be designed intentionally. She seems to know that her reader will be at a loss, and when she writes “they need a catalogue” (Stein, *Tender* 6), we as readers feel the need for one as well.

Stein consistently asks her readers to “suppose,” using this word in various forms throughout Tender Buttons. In fact, she repeats many words throughout her texts. However, the repeated words or “clues” in Tender Buttons and Portraits and Prayers are not as important as the effect that these “clues” have upon the reader. Stein’s nebulous prose and the interspersed chunks of what seem to be logical information work together to break down the confidence of the reader and push him or her even further away from the comfort zone of a reading process that focuses on a search for coherent meaning. Marianne DeKoven acknowledges that not enough evidence exists in Stein’s text to confirm the validity of any one reading: “the possibilities of [. . .] symbolic interpretation are just as limitless as they are unconvincing (so unconvincing that one is embarrassed even to mention them)” (DeKoven 13). Stein’s tendency to include interpretable phrases in her seemingly impenetrable texts gives readers the small jolts of victory that urge them to keep going, while simultaneously forcing them to retrain themselves in how to read and interpret literature. They wonder if they are supposed to persist in looking for meaning in her text or just be content not to find meaning. For example, does Stein

repeat the word “suppose” throughout Tender Buttons because she intends to convey its meaning, or just because she likes its sound? By including just enough information to hint at a meaning in the text, but also including contrary or nonsensical prose as well, she urges the reader to interpret the text, but she also causes the reader to second-guess his or her own interpretations. Again, Stein juxtaposes sense with nonsense, striking enough of a balance between the two realms to create a new way of looking at literature. Her method gives the control of textual interpretation to the reader, while making the reader painfully aware of his or her interpretative limitations. The difficulty of her texts requires readers to experience and engage in the works, and the absence of one logical interpretation places the reins of understanding in the hands of the reader rather than in those of the author. Stein gives her readers the power of interpretation, yet her texts are elusive enough to demand that the readers remain doubtful about their interpretations, thus producing a constant struggle between the readers and the author, and between the readers and themselves, that is at once frustrating and exhilarating.

One of the most significant methods Stein uses to cause her readers to doubt the conclusions they have come to while interpreting her text involves her way of repeating certain words or variations of words, thus causing the reader to imagine that the reappearance of certain words is meant to convey an idea or image in the reader’s mind. For example, Stein’s “Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia” does not adhere to any conventional narrative structure. In fact, the only way to grasp the image or message of the portrait is to pay attention to salient words and phrases that are repeated throughout. For example, Stein begins and completes her portrait with references to breathing and exhalation. In the sixth sentence of the portrait she writes, “So much

breathing has not the same place when there is that much beginning. So much breathing has not the same place when the ending is lessening. So much breathing has the same place and there must not be so much suggestion” (Stein, *Portraits* 98). In the final sentences of the portrait, Stein writes, “There is not all that breath” and “It is why there is no exhalation” (Stein, *Portraits* 102). Might Stein have been alluding to something by recalling breathing and breath? Or is the repetition merely a coincidence? In a befuddled state, eager to discover any sort of clue that might help to disentangle Stein’s meaning, readers will cling to the repetitions of words and themes. They will find recurring images and gain an idea of what the texts are trying to express, yet might wonder if they are reading Stein correctly. Stein’s readers attempt to make sense of the text while constantly wondering if they have found the key to interpreting her works.

Another of Stein’s portraits, “To Kitty or Kate Buss,” contains numerous references to names and naming, and therefore appears to be concerned thematically with titles and identity: “Kitty Buss had the name / Kitty Buss had the same / Kitty Buss is the same as Kitty which is a name. / Kitty Buss came with her name” (Stein, *Portraits* 103). We can infer that this portrait addresses the complex concept of titles and externally recognized identity as it relates to an individual’s inner identity; the first paragraph of the portrait includes references to “ingredients” and ways to “measure.” Is Stein referring to a name as a way to “measure” another human being, though the name may be incapable of conveying the “ingredients” that are inside? Or, as with “Mabel Dodge,” might we be incorrect in relying upon repeated words to aid us in our interpretation? Stein’s tendency to include small morsels of sense against the backdrop of what seems like nonsense causes her readers to arrive at conclusions that are neither correct nor incorrect.

Stein also includes numerous references to covers, containers, and boxes in Tender Buttons. Throughout this book, she seems to highlight the presence of both an inner reality and an external reality. In the first section of Tender Buttons, for example, she repeats the words “cover,” “costume,” “closet,” “box,” “case contain[ing],” “gate surrounding” “umbrella,” “cloak,” “dress,” “hat,” “coat,” “veil,” “shadows,” and “shawl.” This section, entitled “Objects,” is filled with references to cleanliness and dirtiness, and the images Stein uses seem to imply that something that is clean is being covered up by dirt. Recurring words and images such as these work together to convey the possibility that, on a larger scale, something is being hidden within her text. We might also infer that the author herself is expressing her need to “cover” up her personal life due to her sexual preference—after all, few people spoke openly of her lesbianism until the late 1960s or early 1970s, a new openness that can be attributed to Richard Bridgman’s frank treatment of her sexuality in his book Gertrude Stein in Pieces (1970). If we are to interpret the many references to “covers” in Tender Buttons as the author’s way of expressing a subversive disdain for her position as a muffled or concealed citizen, many passages still remain that we cannot place into this category, and the question of what to make of that information remains unanswered. Once we believe we have come to a logical conclusion about Stein’s intentions, we remember the pages of information that do not seem to make any sense at all.

It would be a mistake to thumb through the text and select the phrases that appear to make sense, cheering victoriously when we locate a phrase like “the author of all that is in there behind the door” (Stein, *Tender* 43) because we believe we might have cracked the code and unlocked the secret to Gertrude Stein’s tangled prose. Her deliberate

inclusion of both apparent nonsense *and* illogical prose requires us to acknowledge the meaning of the sections we can understand as well as the significance of those we cannot. However, due to the difficulty of portraits such as “To Kitty or Kate Buss,” large portions of these portraits must remain uninterpreted; therefore, the only way to understand Stein’s more complicated works is apparently to find the nuggets of sense, interpret them, and leave the remaining parts of the text untouched. This method is particularly difficult for a literary scholar to accept because it clashes with all that we know about written communication. How can we interpret a text successfully if the ambiguity of entire sections of writing forces us to leave them unanalyzed? Stein has not only redefined the way in which words come together to form a piece of literature, but also the way in which readers unite with a text to form an interpretation or analysis of its themes. Through Tender Buttons and Portraits and Prayers, Stein has significantly altered the relationship between reader and text by urging readers to engage in her works despite the fact that the text’s ambiguities will hinder their ability to form a coherent interpretation.

\*\*\*

Just as Stein’s most obscure works lead to infinite interpretations while confirming none of them, Huidobro’s poetry also allows the reader to determine the meaning of his poems; however, Huidobro is much more aggressive about asserting his presence than is Stein. Huidobro permits his reader the freedom to interpret his works, yet he reiterates his conviction that the poet is ultimately in control. Huidobro confirmed the idea that the reader should be intimately involved with the text in his 1914 assertion that “Art is not made by plunking down whole ideas, but by hinting at them, leaving the pleasure of reconstitution to the reader” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 91). Huidobro

illustrates this principle in an early poem, in which he writes, “In the tinned pool / That is flowered with stars, / A frog chews nuts / And a toad grinds glass” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 29). The poet allows the reader to forge connections between images, thus ensuring that the reader feels that he or she is an integral part of the poetic process, that the action of the poem is not completed until the reader fills in the blanks and completes the poem. The poem, therefore, becomes an experience rather than an object one receives passively. Huidobro expresses this notion through the poems he included in his 1922 gallery exhibit in Paris. In poems such as “Kaleidoscope” and “Moulin,” Huidobro uses arrows or numbers to suggest the sequence the reader should follow when reading the poems. In both, the structure is not pre-ordained, and the meaning is left to the reader. While Huidobro includes instructions on how to read the poems, the structure of the poem lends itself to many different readings. It is not simply a collection of words presented vertically on the page; instead, the freedom of the structure allows for many different interpretations. These poems are meant to be seen *and* read. They are reminiscent of Stein’s verbally playful “Portraits” (especially the “sea/see” juxtaposition) in that they require the use of more than one sense.

While in Stein’s works, one must see and speak the words, thereby uniting the distinct entities of vision and sound in order to gain a full appreciation of the relationship between the two, Huidobro’s works require one simultaneously to read and see both the words and the objects to which they allude (both through their linguistic signification and through the shapes of objects into which they are formed), in order to gain a full appreciation of the two. By providing the shape of the “lune” when discussing the “lune,” Huidobro expedites and facilitates the process of connecting signifier with

signified. However, though Huidobro assists in this process, he clearly wants his readers to act as participants, deciding what and how to read his word-art. In a similar way, sections of the long poem *Ecuatorial* are ambiguous at best with regard to the way Huidobro wanted his readers to approach a reading:

The bravest captains	Captain Cook
Were going to the poles on an iceberg	Hunts Northern Lights
To leave their pipes	In the South Pole
On the lips of Eskimos (Huidobro, <i>The Poet</i> 139)	

Decisions about how to read this poem are left up to the reader. Are we to read it straight across? Vertically? Each reading provides a distinct meaning. Upon experiencing this poem, the reader is transformed into creator; he or she steps away from the role of reader and assumes the role of poet by deciding in which order the poem will be read.

Although Huidobro bequeaths a certain amount of authority to his readers through “Kaleidoscope,” “Moulin,” and sections of *Ecuatorial*, he is careful to monitor the amount of freedom they achieve; after all, Huidobro believed very strongly that the poet was the one with the divine powers and that he was obligated to unveil elements of the new realities to his readers. Therefore, to assert that Huidobro was interested in ensuring that his readers feel in control of the text would be inaccurate. He redefined the readers’ role just enough to allow them to be an active participants, yet he consistently withheld information in order to ensure that the poet was always in control over the world that exists in his poetry. Huidobro aims for a balance that will ensure an interplay between poet and reader, as both explore the constant shift between fantasy and reality.

Lest the reader forget that the creator of the poetic worlds is Huidobro himself, the poet consistently reasserts that he is responsible for the images and objects in the poems. The poem entitled “Mariner” from *Poemas árticos* is particularly full of creationist assertions:

The bird in its first flight  
 Leaves the nest while looking back  
 With my finger on my lips  
                                   I have called you  
 I invented water games  
 On peaks of trees  
 I made you the fairest of women  
 So fair you blushed in the afternoons  
                                   The moon recedes from us  
                                   And casts a crown on the Pole  
 I made rivers run  
                                   rivers that never existed  
 With a cry I made a mountain rise  
 And around it we danced a new dance  
                                   I cut all the roses  
                                   Off the clouds in the East  
 And I taught a snow bird to sing  
 Let’s march over the unbound months  
 I am the old mariner

Who sews severed horizons (Huidobro, *The Poet* 89)

References to Huidobro's own prowess as a creator are numerous in this poem, as are the allusions to the Biblical creation story; specifically, the line "with a cry I made the mountains rise" echoes God's creative proclamation in Genesis: "And God said... 'let the dry land appear'" (Genesis 1:9). In addition to the speaker's claims that he created the woman, the river, and the mountains, equally important are the poet's claims that he invented new "games" as well as new ways to "dance" and "sing." His creative abilities, in this case, extend beyond flora and fauna into the artistic realm. Not only has the author brought human beings to life and constructed the world in which they live; he has also developed a new way for them to express their emotions, through games, song, and dance. This type of "creation" certainly reflects Huidobro's belief that his own means of artistic expression is unique, and it is likely a reference to his own attempts to teach the world a new method of reading and writing literature.

## Chapter 5: Creation and Destruction

Through their efforts to create new poetic realities and new methods of comprehending literature, both Huidobro and Stein rely upon the reciprocal relationship between creation and destruction. For both writers, the achievement of revolutionary literary techniques is entirely contingent upon their willingness to destroy conventional rules. Huidobro states in the opening manifesto of his avant-garde journal, *Creación*, “it is necessary to demonstrate to people everywhere that we are involved in the greatest artistic renaissance that history has ever seen” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 9). This renaissance is founded primarily upon two obligations of the poet. The first obligation involves breaking away from the past and embracing a new and different set of rules regarding literature. Huidobro’s views are expressed most clearly in his 1914 essay entitled *Arte de sugerimiento* (Art of suggestion):

Let’s put behind us once and for all what is old. Down with clichés. Let there be no more humble ladies in poetry who hide like violets in the grass. Let there be no more careless butterflies fluttering toward the flame. My God! When will it stop? That if a soul is mentioned, it should not be *pure and white*. Anything but. That if there is a mountain, it should not be a high and mighty peak. It is preferable that it be a mountain that chats with the sun or tries to deflower the moon. Anything but the high and mighty. . . . Unless something new is to be said, there is no right to waste the reader’s time. (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 30)

The second obligation of the “renaissance” is to create new realities in the world of poetry by “taking the motifs from real life and transforming them in order to give them a new and independent existence” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 10). Therefore, Huidobro’s most crucial goal is to break away from the old while creating the new, though he certainly places more emphasis on the creation than on the destruction. In fact, in the opening manifesto of *Creación*, Huidobro asserts that “the period of destruction is over; now we are entering an era of creation” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 9). Although the poet’s focus on creation certainly remains constant throughout the rest of his work, in *Creación*, as well as in the majority of his other manifestos, lectures, prose, and poetry, Huidobro often overlooks the crucial role that destruction plays in his processes of creation. The destruction is constantly present throughout his work, and in many ways it parallels the acts of creation that are chronicled throughout his poetry, yet it is rarely mentioned and never emphasized in the same way as *Creacionismo*. Woven throughout much of what Huidobro said or wrote is his ever-present—yet surreptitiously veiled—tendency to dissolve old ideas or denounce his colleagues in order to gain success in his own world of literature. He was constantly involved in “virulent polemics” (Quiroga 36) with other artists and critics, and his destructive agenda seems to include alienating contemporary writers while asserting his own artistic independence. In the journal *Creación*, for example, Huidobro declares that he will not be a slave to nature, and includes a declaration of his divine power: “To all those who do not know my work and are constantly asking what is the difference between me and other poets, I now respond: Other poets are instruments of nature and I make nature my instrument” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 9). While Huidobro’s *primary* focus is apparently creating and practicing

new ways to write, a statement such as this actually succeeds in offending the other writers whose works were included in the journal in which this statement appeared. Similarly, when Huidobro states in a 1916 conference in Buenos Aires that “the first condition of the poet is to create, the second—to create and the third—to create” (Huidobro, qtd. in Kern xvii), he neglects to mention that in order to create, one must first destroy. Destruction is as present, and as significant, as creation itself.

\*\*\*

Stein’s works also reveal a parallel, almost symbiotic relationship between creation and destruction. When we participate in her writing, we accompany Stein as she devalues the search for an identifiable message or comprehensive clarification while advocating the experience of the “individual word” (Stein, qtd. in Maubrey-Rose 14). After writing her relatively coherent novel Three Lives (1906), Stein began to focus less on the overall meaning that words come together to produce. In Tender Buttons and Portraits and Prayers, she focused more on the actual words themselves, completely detached from their contexts. This shift in focus was fueled by her belief that “words had lost their value in the nineteenth century particularly towards the end, they had lost much of their variety” (Stein, qtd. in Maubrey-Rose 14). Her conviction motivated Stein to abandon the widely accepted objectives of establishing a plot and realizing a denouement and caused her instead to concentrate on each word in an effort to emphasize its own unique meaning by pairing it with other words. When a word is no longer part of a “logical” sentence, it exists on its own and therefore is not lost in a string of words that work together to form a message. The unusual groupings of words in Tender Buttons and Portraits and Prayers reveal that Stein directed her attention to specific words,

achieved an understanding of and appreciation for their value, and then grouped them with other words that might best highlight their unique expressive qualities. In a 1940 interview with Robert B. Haas, Stein explained, “I took individual words and thought about them until I got their weight and volume complete and put them next to another word” (Stein, qtd. in Maubrey-Rose 14). Stein called this method the “recreation of the word” (Stein, qtd. in Maubrey-Rose 14). However, whether she meant to refer to the process as one of amusement or one of renewal remains unclear. Does Stein’s definition of “recreation” have more to do with diversion and entertainment than with refreshing, redefining, and “re-creating” language? If Stein did mean to imply that her process is rooted in creation, it is crucial to note that this process is actually achieved alongside an essential phase of destruction. Stein separated each word from the ones with which they are normally associated, broke each one away from its comfortable context, attempted to strip it of its accepted meaning, and then arranged it alongside other words that might resist the coupling as similarly charged magnets resist being paired together. All this, what Stein calls her “recreation,” is actually driven by a destructive phase of un-creation. By studying each word in detail and attempting to analyze each one independent of the object or meaning with which it is normally associated, she emphasizes that “words [have] other values than those inherent in their actual meanings” (Wilson 61).

Stein “recreates” words on every page of Tender Buttons. She unites words that, when combined, do not form a “sensible” meaning: “Apple plum, carpet steak, seed clam, colored wine, calm seen, cold cream, best shake, potato, potato, and no no gold work with pet, a green seen is called bake and change sweet is bready, a little piece a little piece please” (Stein, *Tender* 30). This “sentence” does not convey a whole,

reasonable message. Therefore, since we are unable to study the sentence as a coherent entity, we are impelled to examine each segment individually. Stein's unlikely juxtapositions and her "jostling of word against word" (DeKoven 69) establish an uncomfortable reading environment. By urging us to consider "carpet" and "steak" in the same context, however, Stein allows her readers to gain a new perspective on words to which we may have paid little attention before.

Stein also impels us to examine the language we might previously have taken for granted by causing us to reevaluate our reliance on sight and sound when communicating. She reveals how deceptive indistinct sound and first glances can be by grouping together words that sound the same: "As trains / Has trains / Has trains / As trains / As trains" (Stein, *Portraits* 23). By pulling together words that have a common bond only in the way they look and sound, Stein questions the extent to which inner meaning and outward appearance have anything to do with each other. Throughout Tender Buttons and Portraits and Prayers she dislocates words from their meanings by making the sound of the word her primary focus: "There there their softness. / By my buy high. / A sentence is in a letter ladder latter" (Stein, *Portraits* 74, 75). She juxtaposes "halve" with "have" (81), "to" with "two" (79), and "see" with "sea" (91) consistently throughout Portraits and Prayers. While her experiments with and her emphasis on the sounds in language may not be unique, the way in which she accomplishes her goals certainly is. Stein asserts the importance of both sight *and* sound, and suggests that her "work is liveliest when both read and heard; when our own o/aural talents lift her words from the page and animate them in an informal or formal, private or public, theatrical environment" (Stimpson 188). Stein seems to imply that a first glance or quick hearing

will provide nothing more than an inaccurate deduction and an ambiguous result. For example, in order to grasp the true meaning of the word “sea” we must hear it, see it, and consider it alongside other similar and different words. However, if Stein’s juxtaposition of words like “see” and “sea” emphasizes our reliance on both sight and sound, it also highlights the fact that sound by itself can be quite deceiving. When one merely listens to a passage such as “Put it there in there there where they have it. Put it there in there there where they halve it” (Stein, *Portraits* 81), the difference between the two sentences is impossible to recognize. The first, auditory “glance” is deceiving and inaccurate. In a similar way, when one merely looks at the two sentences next to each other on a page, it is difficult to appreciate the extent to which the *meanings* of the two sentences are similar; the difference in appearance of the two words (“have” and “halve”) is too striking, and we tend to focus more on the different meanings of the words than on their similar sounds. The true irony, and the true meaning, of the juxtaposition of these two sentences can be achieved only when one looks at them and reads them aloud simultaneously. Only then will one realize that the two words “have” and “halve” are similarly distinct.

In Stein’s poem “Susie Asado,” we likewise must use our ears and our eyes in order to appreciate the possibilities of the poem’s meaning. The poem reads “sweet tea Susie Asado” yet our ears might hear something that sounds more like “sweetie Susie Asado.” Only through an oral reading can the latter interpretation be perceived. In a similar way, the musicality of certain sections of Tender Buttons almost demands that the work be read out loud: “Lovely snipe and tender turn, excellent vapor and slender butter, all the splinter and the trunk, all the poisonous darkening drunk, all the joy in weak

success, all the joyful tenderness, all the section and the tea, all the stouter symmetry” (Stein, *Tender* 22). Perhaps the most significant accomplishment of a passage such as this is its success in turning words back into sounds. As DeKoven remarks, an oral reading of this passage reveals that Stein seemed “to be carried along by rhythm, hypnotized by her incantation, to the point where her language begins to detach itself from what it says” (DeKoven 44). The fact that the passage has an identifiable melody but no identifiable meaning is significant; it creates a rift between the sound of the words and the meaning of the words and it suggests simultaneously that meaning is not as important as rhythm and tone, and that rhythm and tone have the potential to convey a meaning all their own.

Ferdinand de Saussure notes that, although the event “has never been recorded” (Saussure 71), we “might conceive of an act by which, at a given moment, names were assigned to things and a contract was formed between concepts and sound-images” (Saussure 71). A reverse process occurs in much of Stein’s work: sound-images that were initially linked to concepts are stripped of their meaning and begin to metamorphose back into isolated sounds. Then, the sounds Stein has created from English words undergo another transformation in the ear of the reader—they turn back into sensible language. Consider the end of Tender Buttons:

Is it so a noise to be is it a least remain to rest, is it a so old say to be, is it a leading are been. Is it so, is it so, is it so, is it so is it so is it so.

Eel us eel us with no no pea no pea cool, no pea cool cooler, no pea cooler with a land a land cost in, with a land cost in stretches.

Eating he heat eating he heat it eating, he heat it heat eating. He heat eating. (Stein, *Tender* 37)

Although this appears to be nonsense, after reading the piece out loud a few times and being flexible about pronunciation, we notice that a language begins to develop under the surface of the nonsense. “A noise” mutates into “annoys” and the question “is it so is it so” shifts into a statement: “it is so.” The “hee hee” sounds in the last part of this segment are reminiscent of someone laughing. Even though Stein’s “nonsense” suddenly appears to make sense, we wonder if she has actually succeeded at emptying words of their meanings and then filling them up again, or if this phenomenon occurs as the result of a desperate reader’s search for answers.

\*\*\*

Stein’s experiments with the sounds of nonsensical words parallel Huidobro’s examination of the communicative potential of language. Huidobro’s epic poem *Altazor* has been called his masterpiece, and it certainly contains the audacious linguistic and philosophical experiments that would qualify it as such. The poem is divided into seven cantos, and an understanding of exactly how the cantos are united is often quite difficult to achieve. The disjointed, distinct subject matter and style of Canto II seem to provide a rupture between the metaphysical, rebellious nature of Canto I and the continuation of linguistic experimentation in Cantos III through VII. Canto II is a love poem, and its relationship to the rest of the text is perplexing. The revolutionary assertions in Canto I by a narrator who is interested in breaking away from the “seats of comfortable securities” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 150) collide with the romantic tone of Canto II: “Here I am in a tower of coldness / Wrapped up in the memory of your maritime lips / In

the memory of your complacency and your hair-do / Luminous and loose like mountain streams” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 152). However, the speaker’s desire to create new realities, and his realization that he is capable of doing so (“de cada gota del sudor de mi frente hice nacer astros”) (“with every drop of sweat from my forehead I gave birth to stars”) (Huidobro, qtd. in Wood 188, my translation), is certainly contiguous with Cantos III-VII. The theory of re-creating language is presented in Canto I, and then that philosophy is actualized throughout the poem (with the one exception of Canto II).

Canto I is narrated by a human/divine/Lucifer-like Altazor, who also appears to be Huidobro himself. As he falls from the sky suspended by a parachute, Altazor speaks to himself, questioning his situation and the state of religion. Canto I culminates in silence followed by birth, as the narrator repeatedly asks for “Silence” and declares “the world is about to give birth to a tree” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 151). The “tree” in these lines reminds us of a tree to which Huidobro has referred before; in his collection entitled *Horizon carré* (1917), Huidobro pleads with his contemporaries to “make a poem like nature makes a tree” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 10). The organic, ever-growing qualities of a verbal tree, complete with branched thoughts and leaf-words that each contain lives of their own, is an image essential to an understanding of Huidobro’s craft. It seems logical to conclude, then, that the “tree” on the brink of birth at the end of Canto I is the poem itself, and that the “silence alluded to will make possible the elaboration of a new concept of the Word which will be used in the practice of poetic creation” (Wood 197). Huidobro sets out to create an organic poem that will pave the way for a new language.

In Canto III of *Altazor*, Huidobro experiments with sound and ventures into an exploration of how a multitude of sounds can produce unintelligible chatter. Elements of Canto III suggest the extent to which language has been overused, and that an “excess of rhetoric” (Dowling 255) leads only to a decrease in the meaning and worth of the words themselves. Gertrude Stein’s belief that language had been overused toward the end of the nineteenth century seems to accord with the themes presented in *Altazor*. Huidobro specifically discusses the “dead languages” in Canto III of *Altazor*, presenting a concept that appears to be the key to the entire poem:

All the languages are dead  
 Dead at the hands of the tragic other  
 We must revive the languages  
 With loud laughter  
 With trainloads of chuckles  
 With short circuits in the sentences  
 And a cataclysm in the grammar  
 Arise and walk  
 Stretch the legs throw off the stiffness  
 Fires of laughter for the language shivering with cold  
 (Huidobro, qtd. in Dowling 256)

Through this section of Canto III, Huidobro expresses his plan for rejuvenating language, a plan that cites “cataclysm” and “short circuits” as the most effective approaches to new linguistic life. He brings his philosophy to life throughout the rest of the poem. Just as Stein dissected words and severed them from their meanings in order

to revive them and rediscover their individual worth, in *Altazor*, Huidobro also attempts to scramble, separate, and reconnect words with little consideration of accepted “semantic constraints” (Dowling 258). The result is something quite similar to the sort of verbal reconfiguration that we see in Stein’s Tender Buttons and Portraits and Prayers. Canto IV of *Altazor* is filled with unintelligible sentences such as “Look at the cart and the assault of crocodiles turned blue / That are periscopes in the clouds of modesty / Bride in exaltation a hundred percent celestial / Licks the perspective that is to be born splashes by kites” (Huidobro, qtd. in Dowling 258). As Huidobro’s linguistic “short circuits” continue throughout the poem, he seems to employ a different technique in each canto. Canto IV includes a seemingly unintelligible amalgamation of parts of words with other parts of words to create new words and new images. For example, Huidobro plays with meaning and sound by cutting a word in half and then attaching that fragment to fragments of other words. For instance, in Canto IV, he plays with the word “golondrina,” which means swallow, remaining consistent with the many references to birds and flying that appear throughout *El espejo de agua* and *Poemas árticos*:

Ya viene la golondrina	Here comes the swallow
Ya viene la golonfina	Here comes the swallfine
Ya viene la golontrina	Here comes the swalltrill
Ya viene la goloncima	Here comes the swalltop
Viene la golonchina	Comes the swallass
Viene la golonclima	Comes the swallclime
Ya viene la golonrima	Here comes the swalrhyme
Ya viene la golonrisa	Here comes the swallaugh

La golonina	The swalgirl
La golongira	The swaltwirl
La golonlira	The swallyre
La golonbrisa	The swalbreeze
La golonchilla	The swalscream
Ya viene la golondia	Here comes the swalday

(Huidobro, qtd. in Dowling 258)

None of the manufactured “golon”-prefixed words are actually Spanish words. They are all concoctions made by uniting an actual Spanish word with a fragment of another word. While the result may seem to be nonsense, the relationships between the characteristics of a swallow and the connotations of the words with which the swallow is assembled produce an image that seems logical. For example, a swallow’s sound is similar to the sound of a “lyre” or a “laugh.” Swallows have been known to “twirl” and their tunes can indeed “rhyme.” Huidobro has managed to suggest the existence of a different kind of bird, one that is unlike anything that can be found in nature, but whose existence in the poet’s world is worthwhile nonetheless. While it might be difficult for us to imagine a creature that is part swallow and part “girl” existing on our planet and within our “reality,” Huidobro’s literary philosophy as expressed in *Non serviam* encourages us to realize that the poetic world—the world that “cannot be conceived anywhere but in a book”—is only loosely based on our earthly realm (Huidobro, *Manifestos* 44).

As the cantos progress, *Altazor* ventures further into the realm of unintelligible language and detached “signifieds.” Cantos V and VI contain unintelligible phrases (“the knot-knight / the trill-glory / without faltering / To the so extraordinary / With its statue /

Night and branch” (Huidobro, qtd. in Dowling 263)) that appear to be nonsense; however, the images are logical and rational compared to Canto VII, which consists of no words, merely syllables and sounds. The poem culminates in what has been called an “inarticulate wail” (Dowling 263), ultimately becoming completely detached from referential language and progressing instead into the incomprehensible realm of sound:

Semperiva

ivarisa tarira

Campunudio lalali

Auriciente auronida

Lalali

Io ia

iiio

Ai a i ai a i i i i o ia. (Huidobro, qtd. in Wood 231)

Critics have offered various explications of the final lines of *Altazor*, and opinions differ as to whether the entire poem’s progression (as well as that of the narrator) moves from birth to death or, in contrast, from old to new. To comprehend the final lines of *Altazor*, it seems appropriate to revisit a particularly significant segment from Canto III:

All the languages are dead

Dead at the hands of the tragic other

We must revive the languages

With loud laughter

With trainloads of chuckles

With short circuits in the sentences

And a cataclysm in the grammar

In light of this statement and its assertion that language must be revived by “loud laughter,” the final line of the poem appears to be a sort of laugh. The poem, however, is extremely difficult to interpret due to the fact that the final line might just as easily be considered the first cry of a newborn or the last cry of a dying man. In this regard, the direction of the poem seems difficult to ascertain. We are left to wonder whether the poem ends with death, with life, or merely with an expression of emotion through the sound of laughter, thus finally succeeding at “revi[ving] the languages.” The crucial observation, however, is that regardless of whether the poem culminates in death or birth, the stage has been set for new life; the old chains of language have been severed and the path has been cleared for a new language to appear.

Although ample evidence exists to suggest that Altazor’s journey parallels every human being’s fall into death (“la vida es un viaje en paracaídas y no lo que tú quieres creer”: “life is a journey in a parachute and not what you want to believe” [Huidobro, qtd. in Wood 189, my translation]), what the poem says about language seems to be as important as its thematic message about the journey of life. The poem chronicles the re-birth of a language that is dead and that must be revived through short-circuiting and cataclysm. While the speaker narrates his own fall from life to death, the poem tells the story of the process through which the poet must go to reenergize language. Ironically, in order to rejuvenate language, the poet must anatomize and reconfigure the words, literally pulling the words apart to view, appreciate, and celebrate what exists at their core. The words Huidobro uses throughout the poem approach the ultimate state in the final line, a state in which the word has been dissected into such minute pieces that all

that remains are the sounds. When these sounds exist in the prisons of words, the individual sound cannot break free and be recognized individually. Huidobro experiments with this notion over the course of *Altazor* and, as his “golondrina” experiments indicate, he ultimately succeeds at slicing up each word until its interior can be celebrated: “just as light is shattered in a prism to reflect a spectrum of harmonious color, so here one word is splintered to reveal a spectrum of analogous and harmonious linguistic creatures” (Mandlove 171). An understanding of Huidobro’s poem thus depends upon our regarding it as a chronicle of the resurrection of a dead language and “the search for a new expressive system” (de Costa 153). Whether we perceive the final wail to be that of a newborn or that of a dying man (or even both) the message remains the same. There can be no life without death, there can be no death without life, there can be no creation without destruction. If our narrator does fall from his birth at the beginning of the poem (“I was born at 33, the day Christ died”) to a sort of death throughout the poem, then the process through which the language proceeds is parallel, though it does not necessarily flow in the same direction. Huidobro’s acknowledgment of the importance of destruction appears in his choice to end the poem where he does. He completes the poem with an “inarticulate wail” to suggest either that the end has arrived or that another beginning is yet to come.

## **Chapter 6: The Marriage of Literary and Visual Art**

Both Huidobro and Stein used their writings to explore new artistic horizons. The writers were receptive to various artistic mediums, and they seemed to share a reverence for the expressive potential of a work that transcends the boundaries of literary and visual art. While the relationship between pictures and poetry was certainly one of Huidobro's principal considerations, many artists before him had experimented with visual poetry; "the English metaphysical poet George Herbert for one drew a poetic altar as early as the seventeenth century" (Kern xiii). Huidobro referred to his visual poems as "poème-peint" (painted poem). While he is not the only poet to have pursued the visual poetic structure, what does prove to be unique about Huidobro's endeavors is his desire to explore numerous unfamiliar, revolutionary ways to experience the written word. In poems like "Paysage," "Un astre a perdu son chemin," and "Moulin," he chose to highlight the "graphic disposition of words on the page" (Wood 24) in order to emphasize the visual significance of literature, and his works reveal "his daring and adventurous spirit in a period when other poets of his age were vainly trying to gild the lily of their efforts to perfect the techniques already mastered by the Modernists" (Wood 25). Huidobro's talent extends beyond poetry; his literary experiments venture into the realm of visual art, and his works are visually significant as well as verbally significant.

Huidobro's strong friendship with the Spanish painter Juan Gris certainly influenced and contributed to his visual poetic philosophy. The appearance of both artists' handwriting on many of Huidobro's works provides evidence that the two collaborated with each other on numerous literary projects. Huidobro's tendency to utilize visual expression indicates that "from Cubism he had learned to treat the text as an

object to be visually perceived” (de Costa 91). His belief in the visual significance of poetry impelled him to extend his writings beyond the confines of the page and to display his words in various contexts. As his later work indicates, Huidobro thought his poems should be seen, heard, and worn. Huidobro worked with the musician Edgar Varèse in 1922 to set his poem “Tour Eiffel” to music. The musical result of this artistic alliance was “performed in New York in May of 1922” (de Costa 91). In the same year, Huidobro organized a gallery exhibition of his “poème-peint” in the Théâtre Édouard VII in Paris. Huidobro continued to redefine the typical notions of literary expression by becoming involved in a “poème-robe” project, also in 1922. Huidobro worked with Sonia Delauney (the wife of painter Robert Delauney, with whom Huidobro had a professional relationship) to create the latest in Parisian fashion trends: a garment upon which a section of a poem was embroidered. Huidobro’s verse “Petite chanson pour abriter le coeur” from the poem “Corsage” was the first to be embroidered on a blouse, and was modeled in a fashion show in Paris in the spring of 1922.

Huidobro’s many attempts to present his poems in different contexts suggests his desire to emphasize the extent to which words are all around us, intimately connected to and absorbed in our consciousness and our environment. His ventures were revolutionary because he actively sought to reposition words in various places throughout society, thereby violating boundaries among the visual, aural, literary, and fashion arts. His attempts at creating pictures, clothes, and music made out of words reflect Huidobro’s belief that words are an integral part of our lives. He implies that words deserve to be all around us, and that their presence in our lives is sometimes taken for granted.

\*\*\*

Although Stein's poems never appeared on a fashion model's blouse, her work parallels Huidobro's in that it emphasizes the expressive potential of visual and verbal art. Stein encourages her readers to engage in a number of distinct sensual experiences with each word; she requires us to see, hear, and pronounce the words she uses. In this way, she expresses her belief in the power of words to challenge, to uncover reality, and to enlighten, yet her conviction that both sight *and* sound are crucial components of effective communication stresses the limitations of the word as well. She demonstrates that the word on the page is not powerful enough to convey a comprehensive meaning; it must rely on sound to bring it to life. When they appear on the page, "latter" and "ladder" are obviously two different words with distinct meanings. When they are brought to aural/oral life, they sound the same. Stein urges us to study the way words look *with* the way they sound. She illustrates that the visual relationship between the two words is completely different from their oral relationship. Paradoxically, Stein stretches the boundaries of communication by partially disabling the power of the written word; she must emphasize the limitations of the word in order to emphasize the extraordinary potential of verbal *and* visual art as a means of self-expression. By grouping words like "halve" and "have" together, she requires her readers to employ both sight and sense, and by doing so, her readers gain a new perspective through the marriage of eye and ear. In this way, her work is intimately linked with the Cubist movement: "like that of her painter contemporaries, Gertrude Stein's world became less a world of ideas than one of new perspectives, new forms, and plastic possibilities that seemed to develop out of the medium of language as easily as new colors might be mixed on a palette" (Brinnin 302).

The many perspectives illustrated in Picasso's Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.) (1907) parallel the myriad perspectives that Stein explores in her written portraits. She examines the condition of a word in various contexts, considering the way it looks and sounds as well as how its sound, appearance, or meaning changes when it is placed next to other words. She celebrates the multidimensionality of each word. In this regard, her work is intrinsically connected with Picasso's in the early 1900s. Both artists were especially concerned with experiencing subjects and ideas from multifarious angles. The perspectives that Stein and Picasso explored extend beyond visual experimentation and into the symbolic realm. The women in Picasso's Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.) were most likely prostitutes: "the first complete compositional plan, done in March 1907, showed a brothel in Barcelona's Carrer d'Avinyó, according to Picasso himself" (Warncke 68). Not only did Picasso portray these women from different *physical* angles, he also decided to bedeck two of them in African masks, suggesting a more complex message about each woman's identity, race, life experiences, and position as a marginalized citizen. The image of a mask connotes hidden truth, a concealed or fragmented identity, and a desire to disguise oneself. Literally, Picasso painted each woman from different angles; the "bodies are seen at once from the front and the side, in a way not naturally possible" (Warncke 68). Symbolically, he also illustrated the multidimensionality of each woman's intangible qualities while providing layers of commentary on the identities of the women he chose to portray.

In a similar way, Stein's multiple perspectives cannot be regarded as merely experiments with the sound and appearance of language. Her works imply that the perspectives she explored reflect her struggle with her own multifaceted identity. Stein's

“inability to fit into any one culturally defined role gave her writing more freedom and flexibility” (Fifer 15), and it impelled her to regard herself, and her work as an extension of herself, in various contexts and from different angles. In the works of both Picasso and Stein, the experiments with perspective that appear on the surface of their art suggest innumerable interpretations that remain submerged.

By viewing the world from different perspectives, Stein acknowledges the constant mutability of our universe. Her mentor at Harvard, the notable psychologist William James, addressed the idea that every object exists in a state of flux, in his 1892 textbook entitled Psychology:

Thus, my arm-chair is one of the things of which I have conception; I knew it yesterday and recognized it when I looked at it. But if I think of it to-day as the same arm-chair which I looked at yesterday, it is obvious that the very conception of it as the same is an additional complication to the thought, whose inward constitution must alter in consequence. In short, it is logically impossible that the same thing should be *known as the same* by two successive copies of the same thought. (James, qtd. in Sayre 24)

In Portraits and Prayers, Stein demonstrates that she agreed with her mentor’s theory. The difficulty that arises when we attempt to derive a clear-cut, unified, straightforward description from one of these portraits indicates the extent to which her subjects are, like the world, constantly in flux. Stein’s literary works mimic visual art; the fact that she has labeled her short, written vignettes “portraits” suggests that Stein herself intended them to be visual. However, her “visual” literary works are not the same as Huidobro’s. Her

“portraits” indicate that the “profusion of art in Paris, and specifically, the works of Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, Braque, and others who had revolutionized painting, challenged [her] to develop a new conception of language” (Kennedy 72). This “new conception” seemed to focus on the idea that a portrait made from words should aim to capture the mutability of one’s personality as effectively as a portrait made from paint. A painting has the ability to portray an immeasurable amount of information. Through her written “portraits,” Stein attempts to mimic the communicative capacity of visual art. Portraits and Prayers and Tender Buttons achieve this goal by presenting images that call attention to the shifting perspectives required to see the world.

## **Chapter 7: Anti-patriarchal Writing and the Formation of Identity**

Stein and Huidobro explored the expressive potential of both written and visual art while discovering new mediums of poetic communication. Crucial to both Stein's and Huidobro's creative processes are their respective desires to dismantle established societal and religious values. While Huidobro boldly attacked the tenets of Christianity in order to declare his own power to create, Stein renounced societal "rules" in a more understated way: she chose not to adhere to the language that had been provided to her. Stein's anti-patriarchal works and Huidobro's anti-Christian writings reflect each author's struggle with his or her identity.

Huidobro's anti-Christian and argumentative tendencies were apparent from early in his life. In 1914, at the age of 21, Huidobro submitted an autobiographical essay entitled "Yo" to a "collection of polemical writings on art and literature" (de Costa 2) called Pasando y pasando. The book, which was, ironically, "printed and bound in the Imprenta Chile, an enterprise [...] run by the Jesuits" (de Costa 2), was "banned and burned" (de Costa 2) when the priests read what the young iconoclast had written:

I moved on to the school of the Jesuits. There I had my first disillusionment. I had actually come to believe that priests were kind people, always gentle and caring, who give out gumdrops, holy pictures and relics, since I had always seen them that way at my house, suave and affable, stuffed with holiday lamb. I found instead priests who were cranky, strict, easily angered and eager to punish. Before my eyes, the sheepskin fell away, leaving exposed something black and severe.

(Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 2)

As evidenced by Huidobro's earliest poetry, the young man's disenchantment with the Jesuit priests did not necessarily correspond with his disenchantment with the Catholic religion. His first book of poetry, *Ecos del alma* (1911) was published when he was just eighteen years old, and is filled with "dutiful sentiments regarding Christ, Columbus [. . .] and the Virgin Mary" (de Costa 20). As he continued to write, Huidobro experimented more with form, content, and his sentiments regarding Christianity. In many of his later works, including the epic poem *Altazor*, the free-verse *Adán*, and his numerous manifestos, the poet asserts his own divinity and denounces the authority of the Christian God: "Help yourself, for God will not help you" (Huidobro, *The Poet* 171).

Anti-Christian references appear throughout *Altazor* in many forms, the most overarching of which must be recognized as the general subject matter of the poem itself. After stating: "I opened my eyes in the century / In which Christianity was dying / Twisted on its agonizing cross" (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 147), the narrator (who "was born at 33, the day that Christ died" [Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 144]) then embarks upon a series of questions and statements aimed at challenging the authority of God: "God diluted in all and nothingness / God all and nothing" (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 148). After enduring a fierce inner struggle about faith and his own fate, "another persona emerges as the speaker's voice takes on a new vigor" (de Costa 149). Through this new voice, the confident, aggressive *Altazor* asserts his own authority after having denounced that of the Christian God: "I am all of man / ...I claim it without fear / ...I don't accept your seats of comfortable securities" (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 150). Having asserted his divine qualities by implying that his life began on the day that Christ died, and having claimed his status as "all of man," the speaker then declares, "I am the savage angel that

dropped one morning” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 150). The reference to the fallen angel is crucial to an appreciation of the triune being that the speaker claims to be. He is the new triumvirate. Instead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Altazor proclaims that he is at once god, man, and devil, capable of creation in the realm of dreams: “For a thousand years I will people the dreams of man” (Huidobro, qtd. in de Costa 150).

In addition to *Altazor*, the entire poetic theory of *Creacionismo* upon which Huidobro based his work is decidedly anti-Christian. *Creacionismo* is founded upon the assertion that Huidobro is the master of his own universe, and that he is capable of creating new realms of existence and new systems of communication. By asserting his own creative power, Huidobro denounces the tenets of the Christian religion with which he was raised, and he rejects the idea that one all-powerful heavenly father controls every facet of human existence. In this respect, Huidobro’s writing, as well as the theory of *Creacionismo* upon which he bases his writing, is anti-patriarchal.

In his book *The Creacionismo of Vicente Huidobro*, Cecil G. Wood notes that Huidobro’s conceptualization of *Creacionismo* appears as a result of “a preoccupation with certain problems that recur with increasing intensity” throughout his work (Wood 8). Wood goes on to assert that “these problems originate from, and can be defined basically in terms of an existential crisis occasioned by the poet’s early rejection of Christianity” (Wood 8). The “problems” to which Wood refers include Huidobro’s spiritual exile and feelings of disillusionment. Huidobro devotes his writing to inventing a set of beliefs “that will give new meaning to life” (Wood 8). The formulation of his identity, and the challenges that arise herein, are chronicled throughout his works.

Having severed himself from the Christian God and the religious community in which he was raised, Huidobro willingly accepted the responsibility of providing for himself the spiritual consolation he lacks. His decision to label himself master of his own existence remains consistent with what we know about Huidobro's personality. He fervently committed himself to each of his life's ventures—"[n]ovelist, poet, playwright, political militant, polemicist, screenwriter"—whatever he did, he did "quite spectacularly" (de Costa 1). Therefore, his eagerness to shoulder the burdens that Christians would normally reserve for their God is not surprising. Huidobro accepted a monumental responsibility when he claimed that his poetry could create "a momentary experience of [the infinite] here on earth in order to offset the certainty of total oblivion which death presents" (Wood 8). While asserting his skepticism of the existence of an afterlife, Huidobro maintains that *only* his poetry is capable of providing him with an otherworldly experience.

\*\*\*

Critics have also labeled Gertrude Stein's writing anti-patriarchal, not necessarily because of her treatment of religion, but rather because of her linguistic experimentation. Marianne DeKoven argues that Stein's experiments with language parallel her experiments with patriarchal structures. DeKoven asserts that Stein's tendency to avoid grammar, linearly-structured texts, and logical messages reflects her desire to liberate herself from the patriarchal structures of sense and socially-accepted language. DeKoven attempts to show that Stein's writing is anarchical because it breaks rules, and anti-patriarchal because it breaks the rules of a linguistic system created and perpetuated by men. She cites the analyses of feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and

Hélène Cixous, citing similarities between their “female” language and Stein’s experimental writings. As mentioned above, DeKoven differentiates between difficult writing and experimental writing by asserting that the latter is characterized by its tendency to prevent “us from interpreting the writing to form coherent, single, whole, closed, ordered, finite, sensible meanings” (DeKoven 5).

DeKoven uses linguistics as the foundation for her argument that Stein’s writing is anti-patriarchal. For example, DeKoven claims that Stein’s tendency to rely on presymbolic language, or “the play of intonation, rhythm, repetition, sound association” (DeKoven 20) that is typically characteristic of “baby talk” defies the patriarchal world of symbolic language by avoiding the “conventional, grammatical, logocentric writing” with which the patriarchy is typically associated. DeKoven asserts that Stein uses presymbolic language in lieu of symbolic language to liberate herself from the confines of a male-dominated linguistic system. DeKoven refers to both Freud’s and Lacan’s psychological studies to emphasize the notion that the “presymbolic” language, or “baby talk,” which gives priority to the repetitive, aural, rhythmic signifier, is replaced by the “symbolic” language (characterized by order, reason, sense, and defined primarily by the signified), when a child accepts the rules of the patriarchal world in which he or she exists:

The acquisition of culture, in human society as we know it, *is* the institution of what Jacques Lacan calls the “Rule of the Father,” or patriarchy (as anthropologists agree, all existing societies are patriarchal). In Freudian-Lacanian theory, to enter or acquire culture is to embrace simultaneously and exclusively the symbolic order of language and the

“Rule of the Father.” The two are inseparable, and both come at the cost of repressing [. . .] presymbolic language. (DeKoven 20)

Whether or not we consider Stein’s writing to be driven by a subconscious anti-patriarchal impulse, her numerous experiments with detaching the signifier from the signified do suggest the writer’s desire to distance herself from socially accepted linguistic rules. She deliberately chose to deviate from her inherited, rational language and to venture instead into an uncharted realm of nonsensical images and illogical sentence constructions. In this sense, Portraits and Prayers and Tender Buttons are certainly rebellious works in that they were written in a language that does not conform to pre-established linguistic rules.

The implications of Stein’s anti-patriarchal and iconoclastic works provide evidence of how she shaped her own identity. Quite a few critics have speculated that Stein’s language is some sort of code, or that it is a kind of “anti-language,” spoken by and aimed at “citizens of a homosexual anti-society” (Stimpson 191). This possibility certainly suggests that Stein was hiding behind her work, speaking only to a select few who understood her language. Stein deliberately concealed her true identity by entitling her two autobiographies The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and Everybody’s Autobiography. She convoluted the representation of her personality even further through the last paragraph of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas:

About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you. I am going to write it as simply as

Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. And she has and this is it. (Stein, *Autobiography* 342)

On this, the final page of the narrative, after having claimed throughout that Alice B. Toklas was writing her own autobiography, Stein asserts, through the supposed voice of Toklas, that she herself actually wrote the story of Alice's life. The result is the fractured and convoluted identity of both the author and the narrator.

Stein's concealment of her identity is intentional and seems to occur for a few rather obvious reasons. Primarily, her status as a lesbian and a Jew in Europe before and during the First and Second World Wars must have contributed to a certain amount of insecurity about her identity and place, and certainly granted her "subversive perspectives of marginality" (Stimpson 185). Additionally, her earlier writings suggest that her "sexual identity had been a terrible problem for her early in life" (DeKoven 134). Stein desperately wanted to establish herself among her male Modernist contemporaries, "to prove herself in masculine terms, to gain the acceptance of Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Apollinaire, and others" (Kennedy 63). She was simultaneously conscious of her female gender, her prominent position among male colleagues, *and* her lesbian relationship with Alice B. Toklas in which Stein assumed the role of "powerful and active professional husband" while Toklas acted as the "less powerful and more submissive wife" (Chessman 7). Stein's complex and multifarious identity was not the norm in her society. Her writings remain consistent with her unconventional lifestyle, and they provide evidence of her struggles with constructing her identity. In the early 1900s, Stein existed on the margins of a society that threatened the safety of Jews, expected women to fulfill their duties as wives, and failed to accept homosexuality. Her writings parallel her life:

Stein was unable or unwilling to fit into any pre-established professional or gender roles, and she seemed to want her literary works to resist categorization as well.

## Conclusion

Gertrude Stein and Vicente Huidobro challenged the linguistic and artistic systems through which they expressed themselves. Their experiences in a foreign environment enabled them to distance themselves from their art, and both Stein and Huidobro allowed their writings to grant them a new perspective on the society in which they lived. The writers examined their own perceptions of reality while encouraging their readers to adopt a fresh vision of art in particular and society as a whole. By subordinating the search for meaning and experimenting with the building blocks of language, Stein encouraged her readers to submit themselves to a new realm of communication and comprehension. By urging his readers to believe in the worlds he created through his poetry, Huidobro asserted the power of the poet while suggesting the existence of an uncharted sphere of fantastic reality. The works of both writers were a response to, and a product of, their unsettled environment.

The era in which both Stein and Huidobro lived was rife with economic, social, political, and technological changes. As the writers attempted to understand their own places in the world, they both underwent parallel learning processes through their writings. Throughout these processes, both Stein and Huidobro were able to explore their own identities and their positions in society. Huidobro's search for new spiritual meaning in life and Stein's search for a new communicative system were both driven by each writer's fundamental desire to create new perceptions of reality while destroying the old. Their works illustrate the synergetic relationship between destruction and creation, and their artistic philosophies support one another in their tendencies to emphasize the

significance of artistic experimentation. The writings of Stein and Huidobro confirm the monumental role that literature plays in facilitating one's comprehension of religion, society, communication, gender, and identity.

## Works Cited

- Brinnin, John Malcolm. *The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and Her World*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1968.
- Berthoff, Warner. *The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919*. New York: Free Press, 1965.
- Chessman, Harriet Scott. *The Public is Invited to Dance: Representation, the Body, and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein*. Stanford: Stanford U P, 1989.
- Chipp, Herschel Browning. *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1968.
- de Costa, René. *Vicente Huidobro: The Careers of a Poet*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1984.
- Dowling, Lee H. "Metalinguage in Huidobro's *Altazor*." *Language & Style* 15.4 (Fall 1982): 253-66.
- DeKoven, Marianne. *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983.
- Francis, Claude. "Vicente Huidobro: Image as Magic." *Papers on Language and Literature* 12.3 (Summer 1976): 311-20.
- Huidobro, Vicente. *Antología Poética*. Ed. Hugo Montes. Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1990.
- . *The Poet is a Little God: Creationist Verse by Vicente Huidobro*. Trans. and ed. Jorge Garcia-Gomez. Riverside, CA: Xenos Books, 1990.
- . *Manifestos Manifest*. Trans. Gilbert Alter-Gilbert. Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1999.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald. *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity*. New Haven: Yale U P, 1993.
- Kern, Gary. Introduction. *The Poet is a Little God: Creationist Verse by Vicente Huidobro*. By Vicente Huidobro. Trans. and ed. Jorge Garcia-Gomez. Riverside, CA: Xenos Books, 1990. ix-xxxii.
- Mandlove, Nancy B. "At the Outer Limits of Language: Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* and

- Huidobro's *Altazor*." *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 8.2 (Spring 1984): 163-83.
- Martin, Gerald. "Literature, Music, and the Visual Arts, 1870-1930." *A Cultural History of Latin America*. Ed. Leslie Bethell. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1998.
- Maubrey-Rose, Victoria. *The Anti-Representational Response: Gertrude Stein's Lucy Church Amiably*. Stockholm: Textgruppen I Uppsala AB, 1985.
- Sayre, Henry M. "The Artist's Model: American Art and the Question of Looking like Gertrude Stein." *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*. Eds. Shirley Neuman and Ira B. Nadel. Boston: Northeastern U P, 1988. 21-41.
- Quiroga, José. "Vicente Huidobro and the Kingdom of Paper." *Latin American Literary Review* 20.39 (Jan-June 1992): 36-52.
- Rohrbach, Augusta. *Truth Stranger than Fiction: Race, Realism and the U.S. Literary Marketplace*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.
- Schmitz, Neil. "Gertrude Stein as Post-modernist: The Rhetoric of *Tender Buttons*." *Critical Essays on Gertrude Stein*. Ed. Michael J. Hoffman. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986. 117- 30.
- Stein, Gertrude. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. New York: The Modern Library, 1993.
- . *Portraits and Prayers*. New York: Random House, 1934.
- . *Tender Buttons*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997.
- Stimpson, Catharine R. "The Somagrams of Gertrude Stein." *Critical Essays on Gertrude Stein*. Ed. Michael J. Hoffman. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986. 183-96.
- Walz, Robin. *Pulp Surrealism: Insolent Popular Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Paris*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000.
- Warncke, Carsten-Peter. *Picasso*. Trans. Michael Hulse. Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1998.
- Wilson, Edmund. *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*. New York: Scribner's, 1969.

Wood, Cecil G. *The Creacionismo of Vicente Huidobro*. Fredericton, N.B.: York P, 1978.

## Appendix

## "Paysage"

LE SOIR ON SE PROMENERA SUR DES ROUTES PARALLELES

L'ARBRE  
ÉTAIT  
PLUS  
HAUT  
QUE LA  
MONTAGNE

La lune  
où  
re garde

MAIS LA  
MONTAGNE  
ÉTAIT SI LARGE  
QU'ELLE DÉPASSAIT  
LES EXTREMITÉS  
DE LA TERRE

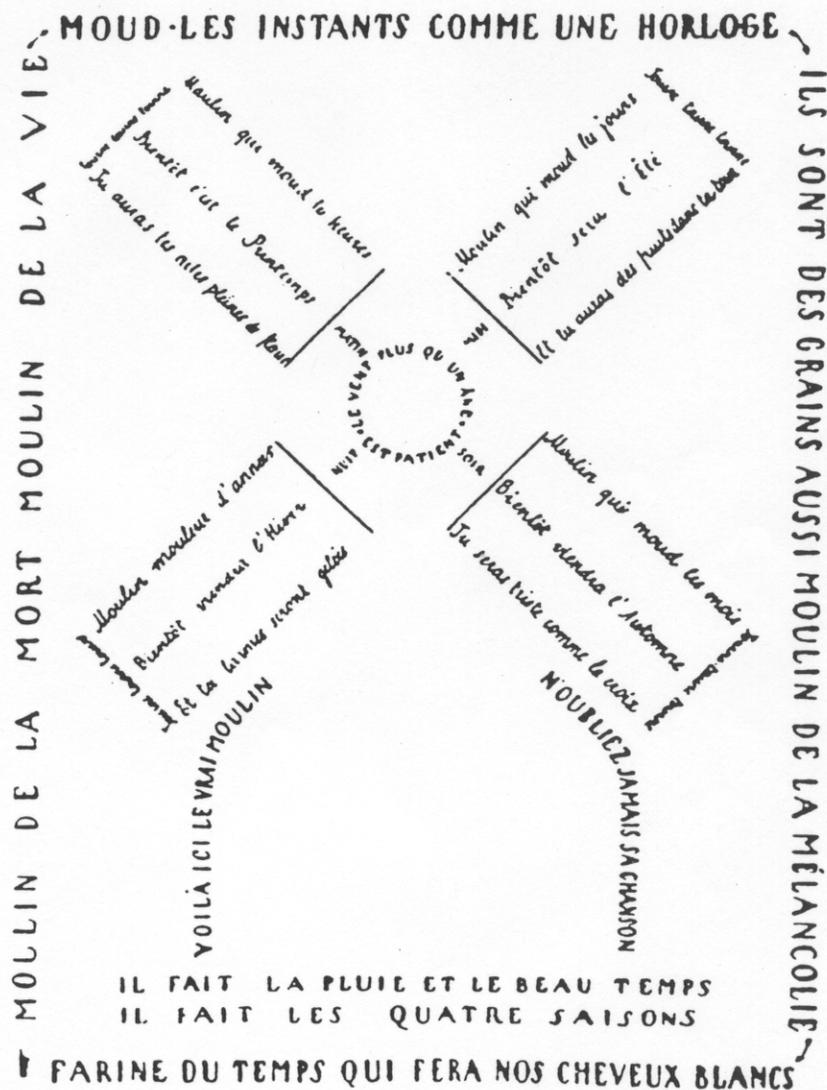
LE  
FLEUVE  
QUI  
COULE  
NE  
PORTE  
PAS  
DE  
POISSONS

ATTENTION A NE PAS  
JOUER SUR L'HERBE  
FRAICHEMENT PEINTE

UNE CHANSON CONDUIT LES BREBIS VERS L'ÉTABLE

(In the evening we'll stroll along parallel paths / The moon in which you  
can look at yourself / The tree was higher than the mountain / But the  
mountain was so wide that it went beyond the ends of the earth / The  
river that flows has no fish / Careful not to play on the grass freshly painted /  
A song leads the sheep toward the stable)

## "Moulin"



(Windmill of death windmill of life / Mills the instants like a clock / They are grains as well windmill of melancholy / Flour of time that will turn our hair white / Turn turn turn / Windmill that mills the hours / Soon it will be Spring / You will have your vanes full of flowers / Morning / Turn turn turn / Windmill that mills the days / Soon it will be Summer / And you'll have fruits in the tower / Midday / Turn turn turn / Windmill that mills the months / Soon it will be Autumn / You will be as sad as the cross / Evening / Turn turn turn / Windmill miller of years / Soon Winter will come / And your tears will be frozen / Night / The wind more than a mule / is patient / Here is the true windmill / Don't ever forget its song / It makes rain and sunshine / It makes the four seasons / Flour of time that will turn our hair white)

## "Soleil"

SOLEIL

Qui réveille Paris

SOLEIL

Le plus haut  
peuplier de la rive

Sur la Tour Eiffel  
Un coq à trois couleurs  
Chante en battant des ailes  
Et quelques plumes en tombent

SOLEIL

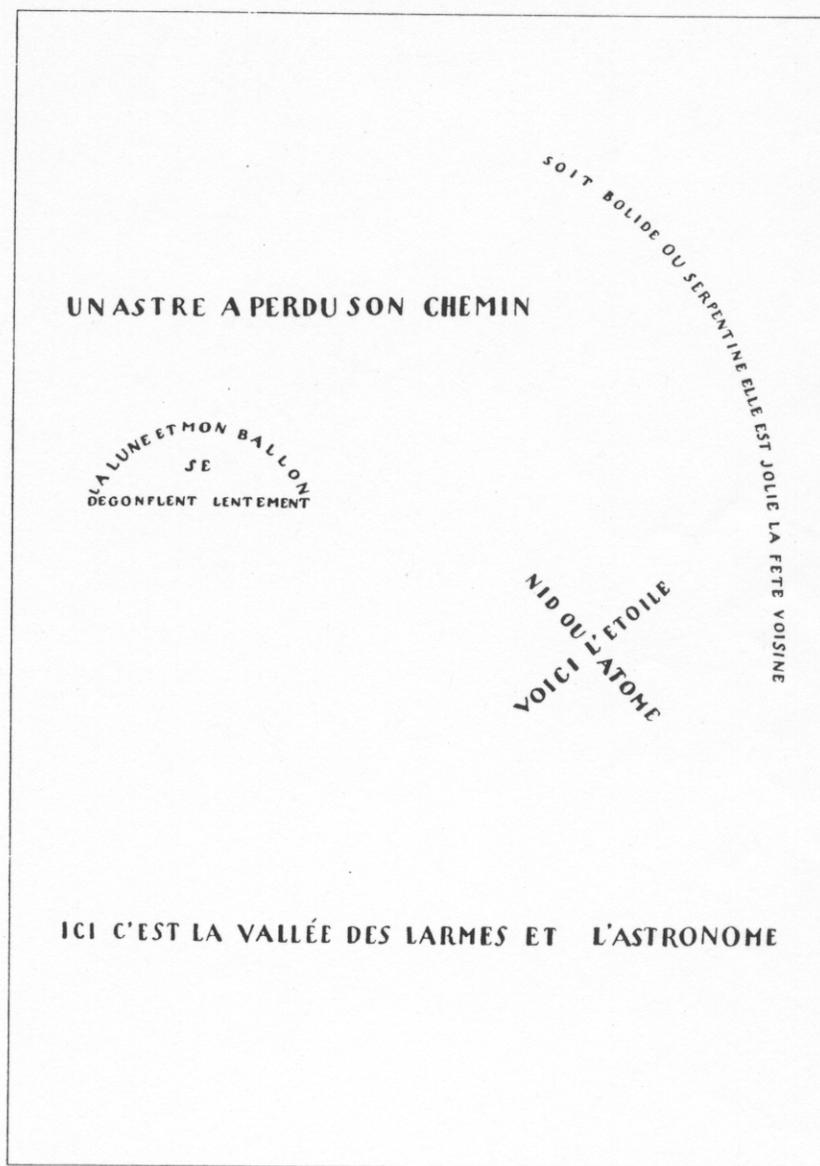
En recommençant sa course  
La Seine cherche entre les ponts  
La vieille route

Et l'Obélisque  
Qui a oublié les mots égyptiens  
N'a pas fleuri cette année

SOLEIL

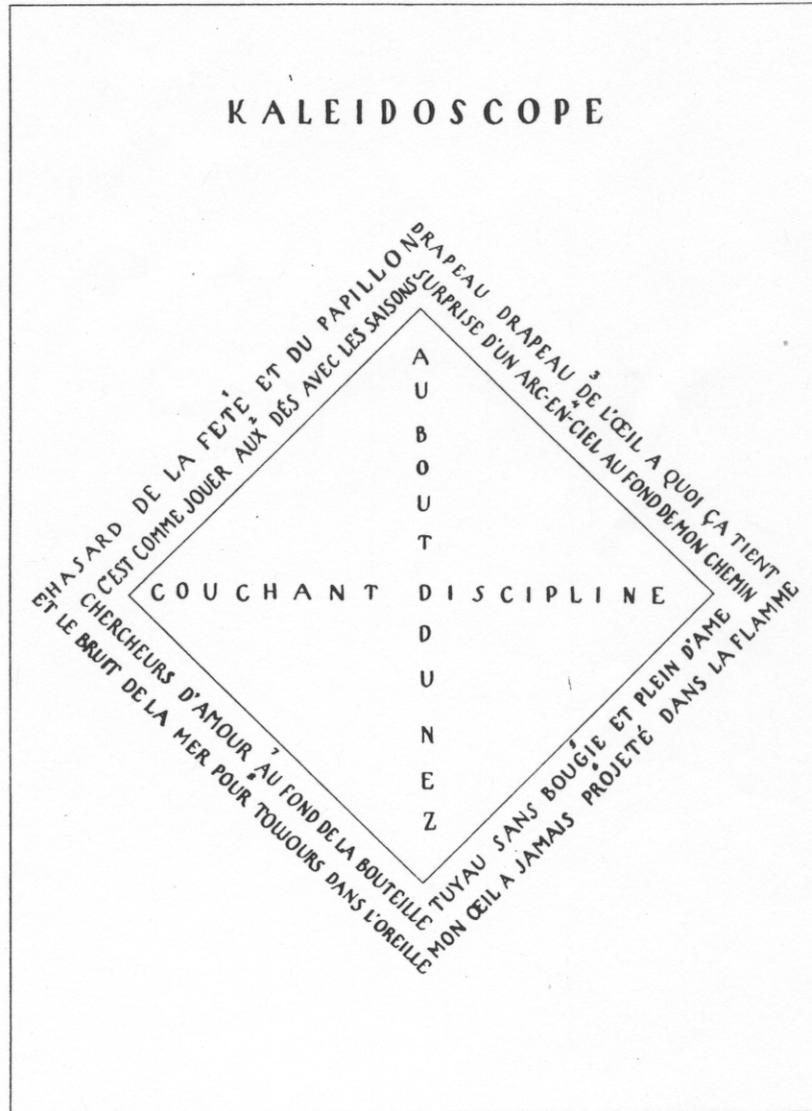
(SUN / That wakes up Paris / SUN / The tallest poplar on the riverside /  
On top of the Eiffel Tower / A tri-coloured cock / Crows fluttering its  
wings / And some feathers fall / SUN / Taking up its course once again /  
The Seine searches out among the bridges / Its old route / And the Obelisk /  
That has forgotten its Egyptian words / Has not flowered this year / SUN)

“Un astre a perdu son chemin”



(A heavenly body has lost its way / Be it a meteor or a kite tail the neighbouring pageant is beautiful / The moon and my balloon slowly go flat / Nest or atom / Here is the star / This is the valley of tears and the astronomer)

## "Kaleidoscope"



(Right at the top of one's nose / Sunset Discipline / Chance of the feast and of the butterfly / It's like playing dice with the seasons / Flag flag of the eye / Surprise of a rainbow at the end of my road / Tube without a candle and full of soul / My eye forever projected in the flame / Seekers of love at the bottom of the bottle / And the sound of the sea forever in the ear)